

**THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY IN
CHINESE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS**

DOROTHY KAY LINS

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THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY IN CHINESE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

by

DOROTHY KAY LINS

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INTRODUCTION

Since President Nixon's historic visit to the People's Republic of China in February 1972 a stream of Western visitors has gone to Peking and returned to report on Chinese views concerning such international topics as the Sino-Soviet dispute and Taiwan and such internal topics as education policies and medicine. While these visitors have talked with officials of the Party and state up to the highest levels of officialdom, the most fascinating and perhaps most crucial topic remains almost totally a mystery to all outsiders. That is the question of what direction China will take when Chairman Mao Tse-tung leaves the political scene, which he soon must, and who will provide that direction. Most immediate is the question of who will determine the selection of Mao's successor or successors, that is, who holds power in China today.

While no China scholar of any competence is willing to risk his reputation by taking a definitive stand on who might win any struggle for power in China or what this might mean in terms of China's relations with other countries, it is generally recognized that there are a number of major sources of political power in China. The major ones are believed to be the Party, the professional administrators of the state, the leaders of mass organizations (identified as the "radicals") and the military. It is the latter power base which would seem the most powerful in terms of stability and ability to make its interests heard by means of its power for coercion. And it is

also the military - the People's Liberation Army - which remains the most anonymous to those outsiders referred to earlier.

As with any largely unknown quantity, it is easy to overestimate or underestimate or to misunderstand completely the role that the army plays in China today. To Americans familiar with the restricted internal role of the American armed forces, the role of the military in China is particularly curious and unfamiliar. For both the philosophy of the system and the reality of conditions through the 24 years of the existence of the People's Republic have contributed to a unique inter-relationship of military, government and political party. While the army's influence and activism have fluctuated in the years since 1949 both as to direction and enthusiasm, it has played a major role in China's internal affairs. And it is fair to say that the army will play a role in determining China's future internal direction.

It should hardly be needed to add that with China increasingly showing signs of moving from her traditional inwardlooking perspective to becoming a participating power in world politics, it is increasingly important for the student of foreign affairs to understand and appreciate the unique role of the military in the government and politics of mainland China.

It is the purpose of this paper to study this unique relationship. While doing so, a number of themes will appear which are central to an understanding of the role of the military in China. These themes are:

The influence of Mao Tse-tung's philosophy on the course of the military since the revolution and its application and relevance to post-revolutionary China.

The extent of the role and influence of military officers in government and politics and the extent to which their military position and background (training) affects their role and influence.

The loyalties and priorities that military officers have developed and the way in which these loyalties and priorities have affected their response to past crises (the Cultural Revolution in particular) and may affect their response in the future.

These themes will be explored in a review of the military's role during the 1950s when Marshal Peng Te-huai and professionals dominated the army, during the early 1960s when Lin Piao served as leader and example of a politicized military, during the crises of the Cultural Revolution of 1965-1969 and in the present post-Cultural Revolution period. And the roles of the two dominant military leaders in China since the revolution - Defense Ministers Peng and Lin whose careers serve as examples of the difficulties inherent in the role of military men involved in government and politics - will be studied. But first it is necessary to examine the philosophy which molded the Chinese military and has guided it through the nation's first two decades and more - that of Mao Tse-tung.

MAO'S PHILOSOPHY ON THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY

"Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun," is, perhaps, Mao Tse-tung's best known quotation in the West. As it applies to the modern Chinese army, however, it is not sufficient to view the military's role as that of a simple instrument of a political party. In China during the post revolutionary period, Mao has attempted to fashion the army into the repository of the ethos of struggle and sacrifice which he views as the mark of every true revolutionary movement. The army combines naturally the traits of discipline and initiative which Mao admires and seeks to instill in all of China's society. Thus it has been Mao's goal to make the army the vanguard force of the continuing revolutionary struggle which he envisions in China.

Since 1919 the leaders of the People's Republic, with varying degrees of enthusiasm and success, have tried to apply this philosophy of Mao's on the role of the military. They have attempted to build a modernized army capable of defending China in a modern world while at the same time ensuring that the army maintained its revolutionary character. This they have attempted to do through the application of Mao's theories to specific military missions and problems.

To appreciate the difficulty and delicacy of this task it is necessary to appreciate the special qualities of Mao's views on the role of the military. First, Mao's theories were almost without exception formulated prior to the establishment

of the People's Republic during the years when the Chinese Communists' Red Army was an outlaw revolutionary force. And, second, Mao's theories reflect a unique combination of the Communist ideology of Marx and Lenin as interpreted by Mao, of Mao's experiences with the Chinese Communist Party and Red Army as they struggled through the pre-revolution years and of the complex personality of Mao Tse-tung.

Analysis of Mao's personal make-up is unfortunately too often biased by political considerations or blurred by gaps of information. Official Chinese biographies of Mao are political instruments used by the state to instruct rather than to inform. Mao's life - his personal qualities - are intended to serve as examples to earnest young Chinese Communists. Consequently, in the Chinese view a deep analysis is not essential. Western biographers suffer from a lack of reliable information concerning Mao and a lack of personal contact with him. Some of these sources also lack the cool objectivity from which such a controversial subject could benefit.

Nonetheless, certain qualities of Mao's personality seem clearly to have effected his attitudes and these qualities seem to have their basis in what little is known of Mao's early formative years. Vigorous nationalism and a belief that nothing could be accomplished without struggle, continuous struggle, seem to be the essence - the foundation - upon which Mao has built his ideas. And these qualities seem to be the foundation of his attitude toward the military arts.

Very early in Mao's formative years he became aware of

the importance and effect that the use of force could have in effecting change. At the age of eighteen he had participated for six months in the army which helped to overthrow the Manchu dynasty in 1911.¹ At the same time, Mao's views were being shaped by the intellectual currents surrounding him in the first decades of the twentieth century in China. In addition to the revolution and the discussion it stirred, Mao, like other young Chinese of the educated class, was exposed to literature which had a martial theme and which portrayed military men as heroes and defenders or leaders of good causes. Two of the stories which Mao is known to have read and been impressed by - for he often quoted from them in later years - were Romance of the Three Kingdoms whose hero is a warrior-statesman, and Water Margin a story of heroic bandits who struck at the rich and helped the poor.² Mao was so impressed with the importance of the martial spirit that his very first published writing, a discussion of the need for physical education in the schools, has as its theme the need for physical education in order to enhance military heroism.³

One of Mao's most thoughtful and thorough Western biographers, Stuart Schram, who often refers to Mao's military

¹Stuart Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), p. 22.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 138.

romanticism, says that Mao since his youth has regarded war as the supreme adventure and the supreme test of human courage and human will. Mao, Schram concludes, has always been (and still is) "basically, a romantic in search of adventure."⁴

Despite the impact of historical events and intellectual ideas upon the youthful Mao, Mao's theories did not spring full-blown from his brain sometime around 1920 to be handed down ever after as irreversible truths as some of his admirers in Peking today would have the world believe. Mao's ideas were formulated and modified over the course of the Communist revolutionary struggle in China and the effect of the experience heavily influenced Mao. His writing on the role of the military in China began after the formation of the Red Army in 1927 and primarily reflects Mao's experiences as the co-leader of that army (with Chu Teh).

It was during these formative years of the Red Army, for example, that Mao developed most of his concepts on the relationship between the army and the people. At the time of its founding, the Red Army was hardly more than a fugitive band hiding out in the mountains of south China, dependent upon the local peasants for food, clothing and concealment. Mao learned from experience that the success of the army depended upon the goodwill of the people and the goodwill of the people would depend upon good relations between the army and the peasants. In response to this need Mao developed his famous "three major

⁴Ibid., p. 138.

disciplines" and "eight point rules" emphasizing absolute discipline, correctness and kindness in the soldiers' dealing with the people.⁵

However, the most significant lesson which Mao would seem to have learned and learned early on in his experiences with the Red Army and the Communist Party was that political power does indeed "come from the barrel of a gun." Until the formation of the Red Army the Chinese Communists were literally fugitives on the run and hopelessly ineffective. It was only after an army had been formed that the Party acquired any status and authority with either the peasants or the authorities. Only then did the Party attract members in large numbers and begin to control areas of the country. Only when it acquired a gun did the Party begin to experience success.⁶

It is clear however, that Mao's military theories are also bound up in his social theories. And these in turn were formed by his exposure to the works of Marx and Lenin which he first became familiar with as a young librarian at Peking University. Mao was an avid student of the two Communist philosophers. And he conscientiously attempted to apply their theories as they became known to him. But Mao had never ventured outside China (and did not do so until after the

⁵James Pinckney Harrison, *The Long March to Power: A History of the Chinese Communist Party, 1921-1972* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 145.

⁶Ibid., pp. 118-147.

establishment of the People's Republic and until well after most of his theories had already been formulated). Consequently he viewed the ideas of Marx and Lenin through the prism of his homeland, its strengths and weaknesses, and particularly its peasant stock. This has led to what is referred to as a sinification of Marxism-Leninism, an interpretation of Marx and Lenin's principle in light of the special circumstances found in China.

Two of the Marxist principles which particularly appealed to Mao and which he adapted to China's circumstances - and which it should be added were particularly suited to the Chinese situation - were the concepts of "mass line" and the "single class." Mao has considered these qualities to be essential to any effective military force and China's military leaders have dutifully espoused them up to the present day. They have fostered certain fundamental military policies such as the need for politics to be in "command" of the army and the desirability of a proletarian-class army.⁷

But perhaps most interesting of all, the very prominence which the army held in the Chinese Communist system, Mao attributes to Marxist doctrine. "According to the Marxist theory of the state, the army is the chief component of state

⁷James D. Jordan, "The Maoist vs. The Professional Vision of a People's Army," in William W. Whitson, ed., The Military and Political Power in China in the 1970s (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), pp. 25-26.

power," Mao concluded as early as 1938.⁸ And as late as 1969, China's Defense Minister still echoed that Maoist interpretation of Marxism. "Chairman Mao has pointed out many times," Lin Piao reminded the Party's Ninth Congress in 1969, "from the Marxist point of view the main component of the state is the army."⁹

Mao's theories on the role of the military in Chinese society, then, reflect the many influences upon him - chief of which were his personal qualities, his experiences and the Marxist-Leninist philosophy he admired. Mao proceeded during the long struggle to power to put his ideas into writing. As pointed out earlier, almost all of Mao's philosophy was set into writing well before the People's Republic was established in 1949 - certainly all of Mao's most significant work to date was produced before the revolution. But while the Red Army of the revolutionary years was renamed after establishment of the Republic, the army remained in terms of Mao's philosophy a revolutionary army just as China was to remain, Mao hoped, a revolutionary society.

The success of Mao in applying his theories has waxed and waned in the past 24 years. Their very assertion, however, is often a tip-off to the prevailing attitudes and problems

⁸Mao Tse-tung, "Problems of War and Strategy," Selected Works, II (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), pp. 224-225.

⁹Jordan, p. 39.

within the military and the Party concerning the proper role of the army in society. Examples of major Maoists theories on the role of the military and the post revolutionary setting in which they have been asserted will illustrate this point and will, it is hoped, give greater clarity to the later discussion of the role of the military in government and politics.

Maoist doctrine on the economic, cultural and educational responsibilities of the army was formulated during the wars against the Japanese and the Nationalists. It was again made prominent during the Great Leap Forward period of the 1950s when the army was directed to participate in non-military work. The old slogans of "an army of labor," "a cultural army" and an "educational army" were promoted in newspapers, radio broadcasts and speeches to the armed forces. Mao's 1949 essay Turn the Army into a Working Force was again widely quoted. "The army is not only a fighting force, it is mainly a working force," Mao had said.

. . . all army cadres should be good at leading workers and organizing the trade unions, good at mobilizing and organizing the youth, good at managing industry and commerce, good at running schools, good at solving the problems of food, coal and other daily necessities and good at handling monetary and other financial problems. . . .¹⁰

The 1950s also saw an effort to build a strong militia within the PLA and this plan, too, had its roots deep in Mao Tse-tung's revolutionary period theories. In his article On Coalition Government, which Mao wrote in 1945, he advanced

¹⁰Mao Tse-tung, "Turn the Army into a Working Force," Selected Works, IV (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1961), pp. 337-338.

the importance of the militia: ". . . this army is powerful because it has the people's self-defense corps and the militia - the vast organization of the masses - fighting in coordination with it."¹¹

These philosophies which stressed the overriding importance of the human element over weapons met with resistance within the PLA in the 1950s as they apparently had years earlier within the Red Army. But Mao was adamant. His philosophy on the superiority of man was firmly stated as early as 1938:

. . . the so-called theory that weapons decide everything . . . constitutes a mechanical approach to the question of war and a subjective and one sided view. Our view is to oppose this; we see not only weapons but also people. Weapons are an important factor in war but not the decisive factor; it is people, not things that are decisive. The contest of strength is not only a contest of military and economic power, but also a contest of human power and morale. . . . Military and economic power is necessarily wielded by people.¹²

The resistance to Maoist theories which emerged in the late 1950s was met by a strong offensive on the part of Mao and Defense Minister Lin Piao to purge the PLA of its professional "elitist" attitude and to re-establish the primacy of politics. A famous Maoist theme, "democracy," was used in this drive to defeat elitism. "Democracy," Mao said, should be promoted both within the military and in the military's relations with the

¹¹Mao Tse-tung, "On Coalition Government," Selected Works, III (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), pp. 264-267.

¹²Mao Tse-tung, "On Protracted War," Selected Works, II (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), p. 143.

masses. Mao's theory is explained in part in his 1928 essay

The Struggle in the Chinggang Mountains:

. . . the reason why the Red Army has been able to carry on in spite of poor material conditions and frequent engagements is its practice of democracy. The officers do not beat the men; officers and men receive equal treatment; soldiers are free to hold meetings and to speak out; trivial formalities have been done away with; and the accounts are open for all to inspect. In China the army needs democracy as much as the people do. Democracy in our army is an important weapon for undermining the feudal mercenary army.¹³

The primacy of politics was re-established in the early 1960s by the emphasis given to studying the "thought of Mao Tse-tung" and to participation in the Party. The participation of the army in the Party also had its roots in Maoist theories developed during the early days of the revolutionary movement. In November 1928, Mao had written, "The Party branch is organized on a company basis, this is an important reason why the Red Army has been able to carry on such arduous fighting without falling apart."¹⁴ And later in 1938 in On Protracted War, Mao again emphasized the importance of political work in the army.

Soldiers are the foundation of an army and unless they are imbued with a progressive political spirit, and unless such spirit is fostered through progressive political work, it will be impossible to achieve genuine unity between officers and men, impossible to arouse enthusiasm for the War of Resistance to the full, and impossible to provide an excellent basis for

¹³Mao Tse-tung, "The Struggle in the Chinggang Mountains," Selected Works, I (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1964), p. 83.

¹⁴Ibid.

the most effective use of all our technical equipment and tactics.¹⁵

These same arguments were heard afresh in the 1960s.

While Maoist theory emphasizes the subordinate role that the army must play in relation to the Party, Mao has never lost sight of the tremendous power that his philosophy allows the military to wield. "The army is the chief component of state power. Whoever wants to seize and retain state power must have a strong army. . ." Mao wrote in 1938.¹⁶ During the Cultural Revolution, Mao found it expedient to attempt to use the power of the army to try to purge the opponents of his policies and to protect himself and his ideological allies.

But with the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution, the power of the army had increased to the point that concern was expressed about the dominating role of the military in its relations with the Party and state. Officials began emphasizing that the army must remember its place. Mao's quotation, "the army must cherish the people" suddenly came into widespread use again in 1971. No earnest student of Chairman Mao's thought would fail to recognize that this theme was taken from Mao's 1943 work Get Organized! which includes this warning:

Our troops must observe the correct principles that govern relations between the army and the people, between the army and the government, between the army and the Party and must never commit the errors of war-

¹⁵Mao Tse-tung, "On Protracted War," pp. 152-155.

¹⁶Mao Tse-tung, "Problems of War and Strategy," pp. 224-225.

lordism . . . the army must cherish the people and never encroach upon their interests; the army must respect the government and the Party and never assert independence.¹⁷

Perhaps Mao's preoccupation with the military and with military doctrine as reflected in the amount of his writing devoted to the subject and in his attention to the application of his doctrine in the new People's Liberation Army can best be understood in the light of another of his famous sayings.

"Everything in Yen-an," Mao concluded in his revolutionary days and has reminded his countrymen ever since, "has been created by having guns."¹⁸

¹⁷Mao Tse-tung, "Get Organized!," Selected Works, III (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), pp. 158-159.

¹⁸Mao Tse-tung, "On Protracted War," pp. 152-155.

THE PROFESSIONALS IN COMMAND: 1949-1959

From the conception of the People's Republic in 1949, the role of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has gone through several stages of change, some coming about slowly, subtly, others featuring abrupt and dramatic turn abouts in policy.

During its first ten years, 1949-1959, the PLA was subject to both subtle and dramatic changes. This first decade saw the PLA slowly evolve from a guerrilla army into a professionally oriented force heavily influenced by foreign military values; then abruptly saw its role in society become part of the political disputes of the Great Leap Forward and its leading soldier, Defense Minister Peng Te-huai, drawn into and his career destroyed by involvement in problems of the Party and state. This first decade, then, saw Mao Tse-tung's theories on the role of the army as the revolutionary vanguard of Chinese society severely tested and saw military men exposed to influences and experiences which would have profound effects on the PLA - its loyalties and priorities - in the decade of the 1960s and perhaps far into the future.

While the political-military philosophy of Mao Tse-tung had shaped the guerrilla style organization and tactics of the Red Army, the new PLA was strongly influenced in its early years by foreign military values. Specifically, those values were implementation of conventional military organization and reliance upon modern weaponry. Priority was placed upon

discipline, technical expertise and efficiency. The impetus for adoption of these new values was to be the Korean War. Some difference of opinion exists concerning whether such changes would have occurred anyway. Those who believe that the Chinese would have turned to a conventional style military force without the foreign influences point to plans the Chinese were making even before establishment of the Republic which indicate recognition of the need for a modern army. The program adopted by the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference held by the Communists in September 1949 had called for the building of a "unified army" with a "unified system, unified organization and unified discipline." Others, however, point to the same document to support the thesis that the Chinese intended instead to maintain and use their army much as in the past. The army, the Common Program said, was to "systematically take part in agricultural and industrial production to assist in the work of national construction."¹⁹

Whatever the Communists' initial intentions for their army, the Korean War forced or hastened a re-evaluation. The Chinese found that they were unprepared to fight a conventional war against an enemy highly organized and armed with the most sophisticated weapons then available. Chinese generals sent to Korea to lead their troops into action were soon well aware of their army's inadequacies. The very qualities which had contributed to the success of the Red Army - its loose organ-

¹⁹Jordan, p. 27.

ization, its huge size and its emphasis upon self-reliance rather than specialization - appeared now to be liabilities to the PLA. Estimates of the battle casualties suffered by the PLA range from 600,000 to 900,000 men.²⁰ Whatever the exact figure, the losses were high enough to impress commanders with the need to modernize their forces to cope with conventional enemy armies. During this period little is known of Mao's attitude; however, the loss of one of his sons in the fighting may have persuaded Mao, also, of the need for the PLA's modernization.

When it became apparent the army must immediately tackle the task of modernization, specifically the development of a modern organizational structure and the procurement of modern weaponry, there was only one direction in which the Chinese could turn for help - north to their Communist neighbor, the Soviet Union. Though the Soviets proved less than generous with arms and financial assistance, they were more than willing to give the Chinese technical advice on the re-organization of the armed forces.²¹

While the changes in organization and weaponry which took place in the PLA during this period prepared the Chinese to fight a conventional war, they also caused a profound change in the character of the military forces themselves. The

²⁰ John Gittings, The Role of the Chinese Army (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 47.

²¹ Ibid.

theories of Mao Tse-tung on the role of the military as the revolutionary vanguard of Chinese society were challenged. New attitudes and loyalties were developed within the officer corps. Professionalism - a concern for the strictly technical aspects of one's work - took precedence over political-ideological considerations.

One of the early casualties of this emphasis upon professional military work was the People's Militia.²² Time and precious equipment could no longer be spared for the task of equipping what most officers considered an unwieldy, inefficient and extraneous force. In line with this movement away from a large volunteer militia force was the institution of a Soviet-style conscription system.²³ During the Korean War the Chinese had made much of the volunteer nature of their fighting force. Now it, too, fell victim to the priority given to a more efficient system of procuring the higher quality personnel needed to man the new professional army.

Another victim was the Maoist theory on "democracy" in the armed forces. Mao's incantation of "democracy" was replaced by Stalin's emphasis upon the need for discipline. Army publications quoted Stalin on the need for discipline as the key to modernization and hence to the creation of an army capable of matching powerful imperialist forces. Discipline

²²Jordan, p. 28.

²³Ibid.

was to be the first step to education which was in turn necessary to master modern weapon systems and organizational techniques. To meet these needs new regulations on discipline were promulgated in July 1953 and a massive training program was begun throughout the PLA. The program covered the fields of weapon training and maneuvers, organization and planning. The Liberation Army Newspaper demanded improvements in artillery training, anti-aircraft defense, mechanization, scientific research and logistics. Even the People's Daily, the Party newspaper, editorialized on the need for technical training and discipline. "Military training should be intensified and the PLA should redouble its efforts to strengthen its highly centralized and united organization's disciplinary qualities" the paper demanded.²⁴

Specialization within the officer corps was another major change with ideological overtones accomplished in this period. The new regulations on officers service published in 1955 prescribed in detail the designations of officers in 16 different arms or branches of the PLA from cavalry corps to medical branch. Awards and medals were provided for as was the institution of a rank structure. Entry into the officer corps was, according to the new regulation, to be confined, in the main, to graduates of military schools and academies. Selection was to be based upon an individual's scholastic standing. Once commissioned, officers would be promoted from

²⁴Gittings, p. 145.

one grade to the next according to a fixed schedule.²⁵ Maoist theories on the need for a "single class" army were clearly not of a high priority.

This emphasis upon professional priorities at the expense of ideological/political considerations is probably best illustrated by the new role of the political commissar. Where once he had been the powerful equal (and sometimes superior) of the combat commander he was now at every level of command clearly the subordinate. And subject to criticism. By 1956, political officers were directed to become familiar with the technical training requirements of their units - qualify on proficiency tests - or face removal from their posts.²⁶

Thus, with the inception of modernization, a professional vision had begun to emerge in the PLA which was essentially in opposition to the principles of Mao Tse-tung on the correct role of the military in Chinese society. Officers became opposed to any diversion of military resources and time to political tasks which might adversely affect the efficiency of the modern military establishment they were building. The period of the Great Leap Forward, in the latter half of the 1950s, saw an effort by Mao and his supporters to re-affirm the supremacy of politics, to restore revolutionary qualities, in the PLA.

²⁵Ibid., p. 152.

²⁶Ibid., p. 156.

Before preceding to a discussion of the period of the Great Leap Forward, the question of the army's role in society which was debated during this time must be placed in perspective. It was not the character and future role of the PLA alone which was the subject of debate in the late 1950s between those favoring emphasis upon ideological considerations and those who gave priority to modernization. The question of the army's future was part of the broader question of the future goals and character of all of Chinese society. In addition, those participating in the debates did not consider the degree of cleavage between them so wide as the rather stark terms used to describe the two camps -"red" and "expert"- might imply. The Maoists did not oppose all modernization. And their opponents would have been appalled at any suggestion that they were opposed to the study and application of ideology. Yet the issues first raised during the Great Leap Forward do seem to have become part of a larger question, one that has continued to be debated through the 1960s and 1970s. Can a society retain its revolutionary character and at the same time maintain the stability necessary for progress in building a modern state? And specifically in the case of the PLA, can it retain its revolutionary character and maintain the security of China in an age of nuclear forces? Are the two requirements mutually incompatible or is it possible that acceptable and workable priorities can be established?

The two sides of the debate over the future character of the PLA are represented in statements made by two of the major

adversaries, Marshals Peng Te-huai and Chu Teh. Marshal Peng, leader of the Chinese forces in the Korean War and Minister of Defense since 1954, stated the case of the professional military. He questioned the relevance of theories rooted in a revolutionary period to the responsibilities of a modern army. "Past revolutionary experience has definitely limited value," Peng insisted. And he criticized those who were "satisfied only with past battle experience and are not sufficiently enthusiastic about the study of modernized military knowledge."²⁷

Marshal Chu Teh was equally blunt in stating the position of the Maoists. Marshal Chu, the Red Army hero who had chosen to retire from active service after liberation, spoke as a member of the Politburo. In a 1958 speech Chu said:

There are people who advocate an exclusively military viewpoint, who have a one-sided regard for military affairs and look down upon politics, have a one-sided high regard for vocation and technique and look down upon ideology. They only deal with tactics and techniques but not strategy; they only want the army but neglect the function of the masses of the people; they only pay attention to national defense, but not to the significance of economic construction to national defense. In essence this is kind of a manifestation of bourgeois military ideas. This is contrary to Marxism-Leninism.²⁸

The period of the Great Leap, then, saw a confrontation of these two points of view as Mao attempted to restore revolu-

²⁷Ibid., p. 157.

²⁸Ibid., p. 174.

tionary qualities and priorities within the PLA. Specifically, the Maoists hoped to accomplish this by reviving the old revolutionary models of the "mass line," and "democracy" and by re-establishing the army as an "army of labor."

The PLA's failure to apply the "mass line" in military policies was one of the first and from an ideological standpoint one of the most serious accusations made against the professional military leadership. This failure to apply the mass line, the Maoists said, was manifested in two erroneous policies: overdependence upon weapons and, correspondingly, failure to utilize people as a part of the military arsenal. The PLA should utilize more effectively China's most abundant resource, people. One way to do this, the Maoists contended, was through the revival of the People's Militia.

In August 1958, the PLA was placed in charge of the 'Everyone a Soldier' movement in which everyone eligible for conscription who was not chosen was sent to join the militia. In turn this militia force was directed to spearhead the commune movement which was instituted at the same time. PLA officers were expected to train this force - said to number 220 million by the end of 1959 - in military arts and direct its work in the communes.²⁹

Another campaign, this one titled the "Officers to the Ranks" movement, was commenced to combat the lack of "democracy" which the Maoists felt had caused the PLA to lose much of its

²⁹Jordan, pp. 28-29.

revolutionary fervor. The army, they said, had taken on the trappings of an elitist organization. Officers had alienated themselves from the rank and file. "Big Bossism" in the form of an overbearing attitude toward subordinates, excessively harsh discipline methods and the taking of special privileges by virtue of position were some of the accusations made against the new professional officers.³⁰

To combat these tendencies and to instill appreciation for the "democratic" values of the old Red Army, the "Officers to the Ranks" movement required every officer to spend thirty days each year performing the duties of an ordinary soldier including cleaning latrines and serving in the mess halls. Over 150,000 officers including 160 generals were said to have participated in this movement by 1959.³¹

Finally, the PLA was directed to participate in the economic effort of the Great Leap as part of the labor force. It was to participate in both agricultural and industrial projects. In response, the PLA's Political Department drew up a "Program for Participation and Support by Army Units in the Agricultural Co-operative Movement and Agricultural Production" and prepared to provide manpower to lagging industries.³² The

³⁰Ibid., p. 30.

³¹Ibid., p. 31.

³²Ibid., p. 31.

purpose of this participation was not only to boost production but also to reduce what the Maoists considered the army's deliberate isolation from society. Arrogance and high-handedness, they felt, had characterized the army's dealings with civilians too often in the past. Now the soldiers must labor side by side with the workers and peasants.

The results of this Great Leap Forward were a disappointment to Mao and his followers.

The militia movement fell far short of expectations. Of the 220 million militiamen officially enrolled only about fifteen percent ever received any training to qualify them in firearm use. A major reason was undoubtedly apathy on the part of PLA officers responsible for the training. But a root problem was the paradox of a militia in a commune environment in which either the militia was efficiently organized to the detriment of production or it existed on paper only. The "Officers to the Ranks" movement, meanwhile, created more confusion than goodwill and understanding. Time spent in training was said to have been shortened by two months in 1959 as the PLA struggled to cope with administrative problems created by the shuffling of personnel and absence of responsible and trained officers from their regular duties. Finally, the "army of labor" was unable to give enough assistance in agricultural and industrial projects to effect production. Addition of inexperienced soldiers to agricultural teams often caused disruption of otherwise orderly work routines within the

communes and cooperatives. In industry the same problem was evident.³³

If the results of the Great Leap Forward were disappointing to the Maoists, their consequences were alarming to the army leadership. By the summer of 1959, the PLA high command was deeply concerned about the nation's military readiness as training, discipline, and morale dipped lower and lower. Party and state officials were equally concerned about the nation's general morale and economic well-being. Dissatisfaction and concern were in the air as the Party Central Committee convened a plenum session at Lushan in July.

Spokesman at Lushan for these dissatisfied and concerned officials was, surprisingly, Minister of Defense, Marshal Peng Te-huai. Peng was a military officer unfamiliar with the subtleties of politics when he became Defense Minister in 1954. And during his years at the post, Peng had developed no reputation for involving himself in nonmilitary affairs. His ideological knowledge was limited, as was his formal education. Instead, Peng was known as a soldier's soldier - stubborn, courageous in battle and immensely popular with his troops. He was of peasant origins and owed his present prominent position as a member of the highest ranks of the People's Republic entirely to his association with the army.³⁴

³³Ibid., p. 167, p. 213.

³⁴Stanley Karnow, Mao and China (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), pp. 112-113.

While most of Peng's old comrades in the Red Army had taken positions in the Party or state apparatus after liberation, Peng had remained with the army. He had, more than his old comrades, an appreciation and understanding of the requirements of conventional warfare and of the military-strategic significance of nuclear weapons. It was Peng who, in 1957, had led the Chinese delegation to Moscow to negotiate an agreement with the Soviets giving China some initial aid in developing a nuclear capacity. Like the army as a whole, Peng had come to place priority on organization, planning and modernization. Ideology was important to Peng - he had after all been a member of the Party since 1927 - but clearly his responsibility for the nation's security was his first priority.

Peng's disagreement with Maoist programs imposed upon the PLA during the Great Leap Forward was well known. Peng had openly criticized the employment of troops in farm and industrial projects. In January 1959, the PLA's General Political Department had issued a statement warning:

There is a definite conflict between participation in national construction and training in their respective demands for time. . . . Needless to say, as the army is an armed combat organization, it must carry out its task as a work force in such a way that its task as a combat force is not affected. . . .³⁵

As quoted earlier, Peng had come to believe that "past revolutionary experience has a clearly limited value." In taking this position Peng was taking issue with what he considered the setting back of military modernization by the Maoists. Inter-

³⁵Jordan, p. 32.

related also was the issue of the worsening relations with the Soviet Union. Having perhaps a better appreciation for the military might which the modern, nuclear armed Soviet military represented, Peng was apparently deeply concerned by the ramifications on Chinese security that a split with the Soviet Union would cause. Less than a month before Lushan, Peng had traveled to Moscow and Eastern Europe where he had spoken with Soviet military and government officials including Premier Nikita Khrushchev. While Peng is not known to have ever addressed himself publicly on the issue of Sino-Soviet relations, it is believed he was opposed to any break in ties with the Soviets.

Thus it was that Marshal Peng attacked Mao and his policies of the Great Leap Forward at the Lushan meeting. He is alleged to have questioned the validity of Mao's theories on partisan warfare, opposed the training of a militia and expressed approval of a professionally oriented army.³⁶

The immediate result of this attack upon Mao and his policies was the dismissal of Peng from his defense ministry post. Yet the case of Marshal Peng must have appeared as an ominous symbolic portent of the future, both to the PLA and to the Party. To the PLA, the fate of Peng must represent an example of the pitfalls laying before an officer who must somehow meet increasingly contradictory demands upon the army. To

³⁶David A. Charles, "The Dismissal of Marshal Peng Te-huai," China Quarterly, No. 8, 1961, p. 63.

the Party, Peng must surely have appeared as only the most prominent and only the first in the ranks of those officers in the PLA who had developed new priorities not consonant with the long held theories of Mao Tse-tung.

Dismissed with Peng were five officers of the General Headquarters Staff.³⁷ All had distinguished careers with the Red Army dating back at least to the Long March. They had, apparently, been caught like Peng between the demands of their professional responsibilities and the political demands of the Party. Their dismissal, the Party hoped, would serve as a lesson to others in the army. The Party and politics were to take priority over the army and the gun.

Despite Marshal Peng's criticism and unhappiness in the army with Mao's policies, there seems little question of the PLA's basic loyalty to the Party and government in 1959. The debate following Marshal Peng's speech at Lushan had been climaxed by an emotional scene in which Mao, in reply to a suggestion that the removal of Peng might cause a revolt in the armed forces declared with tears in his eyes that, if this happened, he (Mao) would go back to the villages and recruit another army. Appalled, the generals present rose and pledged their loyalty to Mao.³⁸ Yet the question of the army's loyalty had been raised. In the years to come it's loyalties and

³⁷John Gittings, "Military Control and Leadership, 1949-1964," China Quarterly, No. 26, 1966, p. 82.

³⁸Karnow, p. 122.

priorities were to be tested again. Would the same scenario result?

For the moment the scene at Lushan signalled a victory for the Maoist philosophy of a revolutionary army. And it signalled the entry to center stage of Lin Piao and politics to command in the PLA.

LIN PIAO AND POLITICS TAKE COMMAND: 1959-1965

Lin Piao inherited a demoralized military concerned for its own future as the Great Leap Forward ended. He had, by the opening of the Cultural Revolution some six years later, repoliticized the PLA in accordance with Mao Tse-tung's wishes and earned for himself a position as Mao's first and most valued lieutenant. During this critical period, between the upheavals of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, Lin had, it seemed, once again turned the PLA into the vanguard of revolution as Mao had always envisioned it.

How had Mao made such a fortuitous selection as Lin Piao in 1959 and how had Lin managed to gain acceptance within the ranks of both the Party leadership and the army? The answer would seem to lie in the shadowy personality and background of Lin Piao. Perhaps no more enigmatic figure existed in the ranks of the Chinese Communist leadership than Lin. This, indeed, may have been a major reason for his acceptability to the Party and army in 1959 and a key to his ability to retain his position through twelve tumultuous years wedged between the demands of the revolutionary bent Mao and the conservative officers of his command.

Lin was one of the legendary heroes of the Red Army having led the central column of Communist survivors during the Long March. After liberation he was believed to have been the most effective of the army's commanders in Korea. At the same time, Lin had no history of political activity and hence few, if

any, enemies in the Party or army. Indeed, Lin's career prior to 1959 had been marked by long absences from public activity. It was said that he suffered from a serious, recurrent illness, possibly tuberculosis. In any case, Lin had been absent from Party and army circles during long periods in the 1930s, 1940s and again from 1953 until his sudden reappearance in the fall of 1959 as the new defense minister.³⁹ Significantly, then, Lin had been absent from army and Party councils during that period when debate was most intense concerning the future character and role of the army in post-revolutionary China. Thus, Lin's assets appear to have been his reputation as a brilliant military strategist in both the Red Army and the early days of the PLA, no known significant opponents in the Party or army, and no known position on the issues which had split the professionals and ideologues.

Lin needed all of the good will which he could muster during his first two years in office. The period 1959-1961 was one of the most difficult the People's Republic had yet faced. All of the mistakes of the Great Leap Forward seemed to bear down upon China at one time exacerbated by droughts in the north and floods along China's great Yangtze River basin. The inflated production figures of the late 1950s were revealed for what they truly were - shams created to cover up massive short comings. Shortages were so severe that famine was not uncommon

³⁹Thomas W. Robinson, "Lin Piao: A Chinese Military Politician," in William W. Whitson, ed., The Military and Political Power in China in the 1970s (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 73.

in many areas of China. Discontent and even unrest grew in many areas of China.⁴⁰

The PLA was not unaffected. The soldiers of the PLA represented a cross section of all of China. The economic hardships and social discontent in the countryside was soon reflected in the army as well. Copies of a secret Chinese military paper entitled Bulletin of Activities, intended to keep high ranking officers informed of conditions in the PLA, were smuggled to Taiwan in 1964. They reveal that in 1960 and 1961, Chinese military authorities were deeply concerned about the morale and even the reliability of troops in some units. The number of soldiers with families in disaster areas was considerable; resultant concern on the part of these men reached levels where desertion and even mutiny were considered possibilities.⁴¹

Thus the disaffection with Maoist policies of the Great Leap Forward was not exclusive to officers dissatisfied over neglect of professional concerns but extended to enlisted personnel resentful of economic and social hardships. In this serious situation, Lin acted purposefully. He took steps which alleviated the alarm of the professional officers concerning the readiness and capability of the PLA to fight a

⁴⁰ J. Chester Cheng, "Problems of Chinese Leadership as Seen in the Secret Military Papers," Asian Survey, No. 6, June 1964, p. 861.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 864.

conventional war. Emphasis was once again placed upon proficiency in use of arms, combat training and development of a modern weapon system including nuclear arms. To reduce hardships among the rank and file, Lin announced an increase in pay.⁴² Whether problems were eliminated seemed less important than the fact that attention had been given, acknowledgement made, of the concerns of the officers and men whose good will and cooperation Lin Piao would need to reach his long-term goals.

The goals Lin had in mind were - in retrospect - clear enough. "Unconditional loyalty of the People's Liberation Army to the Party and to Comrade Mao," Lin had pledged in his initial policy speech as defense minister. He had called for stricter Party control, more contact with the masses and intensified political education.⁴³ Lin had, after all, utilized in all of his campaigns as an army commander the theories of Mao Tse-tung. He had left active command before the PLA had begun to adopt the values of more conventional warfare. Lin's pledge had seemed at the time more a ritual homage to Mao than an assertion of policy and his call for greater emphasis on ideology had been couched in conciliatory phrases.

⁴²Robinson, p. 80.

⁴³Parris Chang, "Changing Patterns of Military Roles in Chinese Politics," in William W. Whitson, ed., The Military and Political Power in China in the 1970s (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 49.

Thus it was in an atmosphere of delicate cooperation and good will that Lin set out to repoliticize the PLA. This he did not alone but with the authority of a powerful new political-military organization to legitimize his actions. The new organization, formed at the same time as Lin's appointment in 1959, was the Military Affairs Committee (MAC). The mission of MAC was to act as the Politburo's agent in directing and coordinating the plans of the Ministry of Defense, the General Staff, the General Political Department and other general departments of the PLA.

Like Lin Piao, the MAC was rather mysterious. It did not appear in any organization charts of either the PLA or the Party. Its membership was not announced. As of mid 1961, however, the influential MAC was known to consist of at least eight officials, six of them active or retired marshals and two of them generals of the PLA.

The policy orientation of the committee was predictable. Its members constituted the majority of the almost legendary leaders of the Red Army. They had long been indoctrinated in Mao's military doctrine. Their experience in military affairs had been gained in years of guerrilla or semi-conventional warfare. Masters of revolutionary warfare, as a group they were far less qualified by experience to supervise a vast, modernized military establishment. Above all, the committee was united by a common bond of experience as loyal, senior

lieutenants of Mao Tse-tung.⁴⁴

Lin and the MAC, then, were predisposed to, in Chinese terminology, "lean to one side." They reflected as a group Mao's dissatisfaction with the political consciousness and reliability of the armed forces. The MAC is believed to have begun as early as 1960 to map plans to re-politicize the PLA; by the close of 1961 as morale was once again restored and Lin gained the confidence and good will of key elements of the army, Lin and the MAC made their move.

The reassertion of the Party control apparatus within the army was the first task of Lin and the MAC. The political commissar had been a tradition in the army from the earliest days of the Red Army. He had symbolized at every level of command the importance of ideology in the army. His demise from co-equal of the combat commander during the 1950s had signaled the greater emphasis placed upon professional concerns at the expense of ideology. Consequently, the return to prominence of the political officer in the 1960s was an important symbolic gesture as well as a practical means of reasserting Party control in the army. Emphasis was placed upon restoring political leadership at the company level and below where it was believed to be most critically needed. Officers and enlisted men at this level of command were considered to be least imbued with ideological awareness since most

⁴⁴Ralph L. Powell, "The Military Affairs Committee and Party Control of the Military in China," Asian Survey, July 1963, pp. 348-355.

had entered the PLA during the period when technical training, not political education, was stressed. All companies that had lacked Party committees now established them. Some eighty percent of the platoons organized Party cells and fifty percent of the squads were assigned at least one Party member. Recruiting for membership in the Party resulted in 229,000 new members in one year alone.⁴⁵

Hand in hand with the restoration of political leadership was the reinstitution of political education. Some 78,000 cadres were transferred from other duties to act as instructors of political thought among the rank and file. Time for this study was made possible by a reduction in time spent on technical training. "Mao Tse-tung thought" formed the basis of this political education. The study of Mao's theories, it was emphasized, was to be given priority over "foreign experiences," even those of Marx, Engels and Lenin. The curriculum of the Political Academy of the PLA was changed from the study of philosophy, history, economics and political science utilizing foreign texts to the study of socialism and communism based upon Chinese Communist textbooks.⁴⁶

Next came a campaign to "re-democratize" the PLA. "Our army had no system of military rank during the protracted revolutionary wars in the past," editorialized the Liberation Army Daily.

⁴⁵Jordan, p. 34.

⁴⁶Cheng, p. 866.

This system came into effect in 1955 after victory throughout the country. Ten years of practice has proved that it is not in conformity with our army's glorious tradition with the close relation between officers and men, between the higher and lower levels. . . .

In response, the rank system was officially abolished in 1965. An order directed that the cap insignia, epaulettes and collar insignia and the insignia denoting various services, arms and branches be removed. The Liberation Army Daily, overjoyed, responded with yet another editorial explaining to any dubious professionals that, "The abolition of ranks will help us remold ourselves ideologically . . ." and would "promote the revolutionization of the army. . . ."47

Having set out to reinstitute internal democracy, Lin also ordered steps to bring about "democracy" in the army's relations with the people. This was to be accomplished through a form of dual leadership of the military at the regional forces level and below. Cooperation with officials of the Party and state at regional, provincial and primary (city and county) levels was directed. By the end of 1965, army commanders throughout China were working in close tandem with their civilian counterparts. Utilization of the militia was one area of common interest. Organization and training of the militia had become the most important mission of the regional commanders under Lin and these militia were placed at the disposal of the provincial and local Party committees to assist

⁴⁷Jordan, p. 36.

in production projects. In conscription and public security projects the military officers and civil officials also worked closely to assist each other. The commanders supplied troops to act as "policemen" in the garrison towns and the officials provided statistical and administrative help in organizing the conscription drive.⁴⁸ Thus, on a day to day basis, the commanders from the regional headquarters on down to the garrison commands established close working relationships and often personal friendships with their counterparts in the Party and government. Lin Piao had clearly accomplished his goal of establishing close relations between the army and the Party and state. But the results, revealed in the crises of the Cultural Revolution, Lin neither desired nor expected.

For the time being, however, Lin and the Maoists were pleased with the results of their efforts to re-politicize the PLA. And no one was more pleased than Mao Tse-tung. Mao had, after the debacle of the Great Leap Forward, been forced to relinquish part of his authority, resigning as Chairman of the Republic. Since that time he had been forced more and more to a role as senior statesman called upon to legitimize state decisions but given limited power to control the decision making process. Mao felt constrained in this role and displeased with what he saw occurring within the Party and government. Both, he feared, were turning into over-sized,

⁴⁸Harvey Nelson, "Military Forces in the Cultural Revolution," China Quarterly, No. 51, 1972, p. 488.

rigid bureaucracies staffed by an increasingly elitest corps of cadres. The revolutionaries and revolutionary spirit had disappeared. Mao, who had railed against the revisionism of the Soviet Union, became convinced that the Chinese revolution must be a continuous process or meet the same fate. New revolutionaries and a new revolutionary spirit must be molded and instilled in Chinese society.

As Mao cast about for support he turned naturally to Lin Piao and the army. Had not the weak and demoralized Chinese Communists of the 1920s gained the power to legitimize their goals when they formed the Red Army? Had not Mao himself long proclaimed that political power grows out of the barrel of a gun? Was not the PLA the one structure in China in the 1960s which had set about to re-invigorate itself with political consciousness? Would it not be prepared once again to serve as the vanguard of a revolutionary society? At the least, would the army not provide an excellent example to the Party, the government, the intellectuals and to all of the masses?

It would indeed. A "learn from the PLA" campaign was begun at Mao's behest in 1964. All political, economic and social organizations were directed to study and emulate the army's methods of organization, operation and ideological training. Steps were taken to establish a network of political work departments modeled after the PLA's political commissar system in Party and government organs. These departments were staffed primarily by political commissars transferred from the PLA. Approval of these emulations of the PLA came from a

number of influential sources. "All our Party and government organs and the broad mass of our cadres should learn from the thoroughly revolutionary spirit and style of work of the Liberation Army," Chou En-lai suggested in a speech. And an editorial in the People's Daily enthused, "In learning from the PLA, comrades on each front shall raise even higher the Red Banner of Mao Tse-tung's thinking."⁴⁹

Bathing in the spotlight of Mao's approval of the PLA was, quite naturally, its leader, Lin Piao. It was Lin to whom Mao gave credit for the re-politicization of the PLA. And it was during this period, in 1964 and 1965, that Lin Piao began, contrary to his custom, to speak out as Mao's champion. Lin took up the Maoist cudgels in a long article entitled "Long Live the Victory of People's War!" Together with his address to the Ninth Party Congress in 1969, this article is the sum of Lin's major theoretical pronouncements. Appropriately, it consisted of a high quotient of quotations from Mao interspersed by a few of Lin's own interpretations of Mao's theories. One new element, however, did appear. For the first time, Lin advanced Mao as an original ideological theorist equal to Marx and Lenin. "Mao Tse-tung's thought," Lin said, "has integrated the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism, thus adding new weapons to the arsenal of Marxism-Leninism."⁵⁰ This elevation of Mao's

⁴⁹Jordan, p. 35.

⁵⁰M. Rejai, Mao Tse-tung on Revolution and War (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1970), p. 400.

views into the realm of sacrosanct ideology naturally was intended to remove Mao's pronouncements from the realm of debate or opposition.

This article, published in September 1965, is now considered to have been one in the volley of opening shots of the Cultural Revolution. The PLA originated many of these first rhetorical shots. Specifically, it did this by the publication of two other political tracts which were to be among the first portents of the new cult of Mao and revolution. The first of these was the publication of Quotations from Chairman Mao by the General Political Department of the army in 1964. This celebrated "little red book" was to become the bible of the equally celebrated Red Guards, providing them with guidance in adopting the proper revolutionary political attitudes. The second publication was an article printed in the Liberation Army Daily of 29 November 1965. It contained an attack on a play written by the vice-mayor of Peking, Wu Han. The hero of Wu's play had, in good revolutionary fashion, attacked the exulted position of an emperor. The "hero," however, bore a striking resemblance to the dismissed Marshal Peng and the "emperor" was unmistakably Mao. The criticism of Wu set off a chain of attacks on other intellectuals as well as Party and government officials who took issue with Mao.⁵¹

As 1966 began it appeared that Lin Piao had achieved his goal of re-politicizing the PLA. Lin had not accomplished this,

⁵¹Karnow, pp. 151-155.

however, without encountering opposition. There is evidence that a major "house cleaning" had taken place within the higher echelons of the PLA as Lin moved to consolidate his position. Changes were made in the central headquarters and at the regional and provincial levels. Key officers who might oppose Lin's policies were replaced with trusted supporters.

The first major shake-up had occurred in 1963 when Lin replaced the commander and vice minister of the Public Security Troops, the commander of the Peking garrison and the Hopei and Shansi military district commanders. In 1964 and 1965, new PLA commanders were assigned to strategic posts in Nanking, Canton, Honan and Kunming.⁵² The change with most apparent political connotations, however, was the removal of Chief of Staff Lo Jui-chin in 1965. Lo was criticized for advocating a "bourgeoisie military line" which placed more importance in warfare upon the effects of weapons and less upon human factors. Lo was also said to have opposed the PLA's use in large scale agricultural projects.⁵³ Lo's dismissal, in retrospect, seems less surprising and perhaps less significant than his longevity in his post. He had assumed his position in 1959 and had maintained his influential post throughout the period when Lin was attempting to redirect the PLA away from

⁵²Derek J. Waller, The Government and Politics of Communist China (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1971), p. 110.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 111-112.

the views Lo was said to have represented. Lo must have enjoyed some important support during all of those years.

The reforms and personnel purges of this period appeared to have successfully turned the PLA into a revolutionary army which might be used by Lin and Mao for their political purposes. The use of PLA organs to verbally attack Mao's opponents and spread Mao Tse-tung thought seemed portents for the future. Yet only a small cabal of senior officers, trusted lieutenants surrounding Lin Piao, had committed themselves to the coming political struggle; had participated in its preparation; or, for that matter, apparently perceived the significance of the initial rhetorical debates. The remainder of the army apparently neither fully understood nor was responsible for the machinations taking place in Peking. It remained yet to be heard from.

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION: 1966-1969

The years of the Cultural Revolution were for the PLA, as for the other elements of society, the most chaotic and most challenging since 1949. The Cultural Revolution was a test of the character of the army. And it was the most severe test to date of the Maoist theories on the role of the army in society. Could the PLA function in a post revolutionary society as the vanguard of a new revolution? What were the priorities and loyalties of its officers? The Cultural Revolution went a long way toward answering these questions.

The PLA's participation in the Cultural Revolution can be broken down into four periods representing various stages of activity. These periods (1) the year 1966, (2) winter and spring 1967, (3) summer 1967 and (4) fall 1967 through April 1969, will be discussed in detail to indicate the development of the role of the PLA to its - in retrospect, not so surprising - conclusion.

1966

In February 1966, Madame Mao - Chiang Ching - convened in Shanghai a "Forum on the Literary and Art Work in the Armed Forces."⁵⁴ The report issued at the end of this eighteen day forum hardly concerned itself with the state of the arts in the

⁵⁴Parris Chang, "Regional Military Power: The Aftermath of the Cultural Revolution," Asian Survey, No. 12, December 1972, p. 100.

army. Instead the report, personally revised by Mao, spelled out Mao's intention to launch the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution as a campaign against the "revisionist" Party and state apparatus. China was to begin, the document said, an arduous, long-term campaign designed to eliminate those who opposed Mao. More ominously, the communique asserted that the drive would be carried out by the army - "The chief instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat in China." This document was to be the blueprint of the Cultural Revolution.

At this time in 1966, Mao Tse-tung had found himself opposed in the top leadership of the Politburo by a majority of its members led by the chief of state, Liu Shao-chi. Mao saw his radical policies opposed at almost every turn and his influence carefully reined. Only Lin Piao and the army appeared to espouse and apply Maoist principles and policies. Consequently, with Madame Mao as his agent, Mao had used the army as his forum, his vehicle in officially opening a campaign against what he considered revisionist elements in all of Chinese society.

After the Shanghai Communique was issued, through the auspices of the PLA, Lin Piao and his closest associates in the army central leadership began actively to promote the Cultural Revolution. The Liberation Army Daily was used to attack Mao's critics in the intellectual community. It served as a counterpoint to the Party organ, the People's Daily, in the propaganda battle between Mao and his critics. By June 1966, Lin and other Maoists succeeded in seizing the People's Daily

editorial board and placing it under the control of the PLA's newly formed PLA Cultural Revolution Group.⁵⁵ (This group had been formed by the General Political Department of the PLA at the instructions of the MAC to direct Cultural Revolution activities in the army. It was under almost continual attack and purge until its disestablishment; membership became a dubious distinction.)

The culmination of this support by Lin and the central PLA leadership for the instigation of the Cultural Revolution came on 19 August in Peking's Tienanmen Square when a million Maoist supporters - most of them teen-age Red Guards - met to rally support. Lin Piao was the main speaker. Mao, symbolically, wore a military uniform for the first time in anyone's memory.⁵⁶

While the central leadership was busy promoting the Cultural Revolution from Peking, it was business more or less as usual for the PLA in the provinces. The thrust of the revolution had thus far been directed at the youth of China and at the educational system. For its part, the PLA was to participate in its now customary role as teacher and helper. Military districts and garrisons were called upon to send out cadres from their political departments to act as teachers in the schools. And, when the rambunctious Red Guards began

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Karnow, p. 194.

traveling to and from Peking and about the country on their crusades, the PLA arranged their transportation and acted as chaperones.⁵⁷

By late summer, however, the crusades of the Red Guards began to take a new turn. No longer were the objects of their reforming rage restricted to China's education system and intellectual community. Now the Red Guards and other Maoists turned on the Party and state. Strikes closed factories, judicial and police organs were attacked and discredited, work at Party headquarters and state offices was disrupted, and "bad elements" with nonproletarian class backgrounds were attacked and often robbed. Personal attacks were made upon officials at every level and these officials were subjected to humiliating and often cruel interrogation sessions.⁵⁸

The assaults by the Red Guards and "revolutionary rebels" on the provincial Party and state structure revealed some of the loyalties and priorities of the army. The local and regional military commanders were alarmed by the havoc, by the disruption caused to the daily functioning of vital activities, by the lack of discipline shown by the "rebels" and by the personal attacks made upon officials with whom they were closely associated. Values they cherished were disregarded. And the Cultural Revolution was coming uncomfortably close.

⁵⁷Chang, "Changing Patterns of Military Roles in Chinese Politics," p. 54.

⁵⁸Karnow, pp. 194-236.

At this point it is necessary to pause a moment to describe the organizational structure of the PLA as this structure and the duties assigned within the structure appear to have significantly effected response to the events taking place around the PLA during the Cultural Revolution. The PLA is divided into two major forces, each with a separate mission. The elite of the PLA are the 36 army corps, the Navy and the Air Force.⁵⁹ The units of these forces are centrally controlled from Peking and are generally stationed in the most strategically sensitive border areas of China - in the north along the border with the Soviet Union, in the southeast across from Taiwan and in the far south along the Vietnamese border. Since these forces are designated to protect China from attack and form the first line of defense, they are naturally accorded highest priority. They are provided with the newest and largest supply of weapons, assigned the brightest and most competent officers and troops and given priority in promotion and other amenities. Significantly, given the high priority of their military assignment, fewer non-military responsibilities are assigned. They are allowed to concentrate for the most part upon technical training at the expense of political training and allowed to concentrate on their missions without interference from local Party or state officials. They are, in short, elite and aloof from politics.

⁵⁹Harvey Nelson, "Military Forces in the Cultural Revolution," China Quarterly, No. 51, July-September 1972, p. 444.

The remainder of the PLA is assigned to the regional forces - a vast, decentralized army spread throughout the countryside. The regional forces are divided into eleven regions, 23 provincial districts and numerous garrisons in larger cities. The eleven regional commanders are responsible for the provincial districts and the larger garrisons. The provincial commanders control the independent units and smaller garrisons within their provinces. This huge armed force is the poor cousin to the more elite units. The regional forces are assigned weapons and other equipment outmoded or not needed by the elite corps. Their officers and troops are those not considered good enough for the more vital forces. Their assignment is primarily to maintain internal security and to train the militia.

The regional forces were Lin's major target when in the early 1960s he began to repoliticize the PLA. And one of the most important effects on the regional forces had been the knitting together of state, Party and military at the regional level and below through the linking of their leadership. The most important manifestation of this policy was the appointment of senior provincial Party secretaries as concurrent political commissars of the military districts.⁶⁰ In 1966, eighteen of 23 districts had this arrangement. As described in section IV, this cooperation between Party and state officials with their military counterparts worked to the benefit of both and was a

⁶⁰Ibid.

natural outgrowth of the role assigned to the army in Maoist theory.

It should not be surprising then that regional force officers of the PLA were those most alarmed at the new turn which the Cultural Revolution had taken in late 1966. The economy had been disrupted, particularly in the cities. Schools were closed and youths were roving in bands through the cities uncontrolled. Professional associates in the Party and state bureaucracy were under personal attack and the business of the Party and state had come near to a halt. State property was looted, violence was on the increase. After initial confusion and inaction, Party and state officials had begun an offensive of their own. They organized Red Guard factions of their own to challenge the Maoists. They took steps to safeguard their offices and property. They began counter propaganda campaigns.

Caught between these two factions, the PLA commanders became increasingly uncomfortable. On the one hand they were the teachers and chaperones of the Maoist faction; on the other, they were the professional associates of the Party and state officials. And above all, they were responsible for the security of the nation. Throughout the delicate last days of 1966 the PLA walked a treacherous high wire at once arranging transportation to Peking rallies for the Red Guards and at the same time rescuing civilian officials from scenes of physical violence and guarding public buildings from pillaging by the youths.

It was a state of affairs which could not last.

Winter and Spring 1967

With the new year, the leadership of the Cultural Revolution in Peking found that their revolution had turned into a disordered stalemate throughout most of China. Action had to be taken, Mao personally decided, to both end the disorder and to tip the balance in the power struggle in favor of the Maoists. With the Party and the state already caught up in the struggle, Mao could only turn to the one structure in society still in tact and responsive to commands, the PLA. The PLA's response and the events of 1967 which were to follow were hardly what Mao must have expected.

At a meeting of the Central Cultural Revolution Group in Peking in mid January the plight of the revolution was bluntly faced. It had become evident to the Maoists that their conservative opponents were stronger and more intransigent than expected and their supporters, the Red Guards and revolutionary rebels, more difficult to control. A decision was made, somewhat reluctantly, to call upon the army to restore order and to purge the conservative opponents of Mao Tse-tung.⁶¹ The rationale for this decision was provided by Mao himself. "The so-called non-involvement is false, for the army is already involved," Mao said.

⁶¹ Chang, "Changing Patterns of Military Roles in Chinese Politics," p. 56.

The question therefore is not one of involvement or noninvolvement. It is one of whose side we should stand on and whether we should support the revolutionaries or the conservative or even the rightists. The PLA should actively support the revolutionary forces.

This was the setting on 23 January 1967 when the MAC issued orders to the PLA to take over administrative functions in the country and to "support the left."

The PLA began at once - and with considerable relish - to carry out the first part of this order. The first priority of almost all PLA commanders was to restore order in China. This they could do by controlling administrative functions. Military units occupied industrial plants and warehouses, moved into communes and took control of the police and security establishments.

Not surprisingly, the PLA's first step was the seizure of the police and public security organs.⁶² These institutions constituted the major internal security mechanisms in China and included the secret police and armed security units at government levels from the center in Peking down to villages and streets. The seizures usually took the form of establishing military control committees inside the bureaus at each successive level of authority. But it also required, given the degree of lawlessness at the time, the commitment of troops to supplement the overtaxed and demoralized police and security forces. The PLA thus became involved in arresting

⁶²Ralph L. Powell and Chon-kun Yoon, "Public Security and the PLA," Asian Survey, No. 12, December 1972, p. 1090.

criminals, stopping riots, controlling traffic, sponsoring public trials and supervising prisons.

The PLA also showed no reluctance in assuming its new expanded role in the economy.⁶³ The decline in the morale and authority of the rural and industrial cadres had broken down the regular economic leadership. The military was directed to move into this vacuum. Large numbers of PLA personnel were sent into local communes and farming brigades. Emphasis was placed upon improving strained working relations between supervising cadres and workers and upon preventing sabotage and increasing slack labor discipline among peasants caused by the confusion of recent events. The order to support industrial production in factories and mines received an even more positive response than the call to enter the communes and farms. Responsible for national defense and suffering from the increasing obsolescence of weapons, the PLA commanders had a specially vital interest in protecting and promoting industry. Consequently, PLA men quickly moved into industries and worked to end strikes and disruptions and increase production.

The regional force commanders found increasing power placed in their hands by the control of these vital functions. The way that they chose to use this power should not have been surprising given their priorities and loyalties. Once in charge of the police and security functions they increased their

⁶³Ralph L. Powell, "Soldiers in the Economy," Asian Survey, No. 8, August 1971, pp. 748-753.

protection of Party and state officials as well as state offices and documents. And Red Guards who got out of hand were dealt with firmly. In industry and agriculture the PLA acted as armed persuaders and not as armed producers. The practical reason for this was the lack of experience and know-how of soldiers in running industrial and agricultural projects. Working alliances often resulted between the military and the managerial and technical cadres at the expense of the Maoists in mines and factories, communes and cooperatives. The PLA was unwilling to promote politics if it were at the expense of law and order, efficiency and proficiency. The PLA sought to preserve order and maintain the nation's strength. But at the same time the PLA's power was increasing at the provincial and local level. Decisions became more and more decentralized and fell more often than not into the hands of the regional force officers.

While the military's response to the order to take over administrative functions was positive, the army's response to Mao's order to "support the left" was, at best, hesitant and ambiguous, and at the worst, defiant. The revolutionary rebels had been given authority by Mao to seize power from the Party and state and to replace these structures with a new one - the revolutionary committee. The PLA was to provide the radicals with support and to intervene when they were unable to overcome opposition by themselves. This task gave the PLA a life or death influence over the new political organizations.

In most areas rival revolutionary rebel and Red Guard

factions had appeared to challenge the radicals.⁶⁴ Some of them were composed of former cadres and the children of Party, state and even military officers. The determination of which faction was to receive support from the PLA fell to the regional force officers. In many areas the PLA used its power as arbitor between rival factions to suppress the most radical groups and to legitimize the more conservative groups. Thus the PLA in its designated role as supporters of the left were often a force of restraint rather than an avant garde of the left.

Amidst this political strife the formation of the new revolutionary committees moved at a snails pace when it moved at all. In the eight months of 1967 only six provinces formed committees.⁶⁵ These were Heilungkiang, Shantung, Kweichow and Shansi provinces and Peking and Shanghai municipalities (the latter two had the administrative status of provinces due to their size). But even in these units the authority of the radicals was often carefully circumscribed. Shantung Province is an example.⁶⁶ The Commander of the Tsinan Military Region which is centered on Shantung was General Yang Te-chich. In

⁶⁴Chang, "Changing Patterns of Military Roles in Chinese Politics," p. 67.

⁶⁵Jurgen Domes, "The Role of the Military in the Formation of Revolutionary Committees," China Quarterly, No. 44, October-December, 1970, p. 112.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 117.

response to the January directive to support the left, General Yang immediately proclaimed that his units were prepared to support "with all might the Maoist struggle for the seizure of power." Local forces joined revolutionary rebels in the overthrow of the old provincial Party committee. But when the new Revolutionary Committee was officially formed on 23 February, the PLA's First Political Commissar for Tsinan Military Area was appointed chairman and General Yang himself became First Vice-Chairman. The membership of the thirteen man committee included eight former Party and state cadres, three PLA officers and only two Maoist organization representatives.

In many other provinces the January order to support the left was received an even less positive response and in some it was ignored. Not even the first step toward committee formation was taken in four provinces. The reaction of commanders in the provinces to Maoist directions from Peking during this period was measured by China-watchers through response to a Peking-originated campaign to help farmers with spring ploughing.⁶⁷ The slogan for this campaign, in accordance with the precepts of the Cultural Revolution, was to be "Grasp Revolution! Promote Production!" There developed an interesting ideological differentiation in the use of this slogan by commanders in the provinces. The commanders in a few provinces called for just such "Grasp Revolution! Promote Production!" campaigns. The majority however were satisfied to

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 120.

hold "Promote Production!" campaigns. Since the term "revolution" served as a shibboleth for the Maoists, it seems justified to assume that those commanders who did not use this term had some differences in priorities and intended to keep their distance from the Maoists. More ominous still for Mao was the defiance shown by seven provinces in which no campaign of any kind was instituted.

By mid April it was clear that the thrusting of the military into the Cultural Revolution had not produced the intended results. The Central Cultural Revolution Group leadership was distressed to find its objectives thwarted by the very "vanguard of the revolution" in China. Steps had to be taken to correct this situation. Through the MAC the Maoists issued a directive repeating the order to support the left and severely restricting the PLA's ability to discipline revolutionary rebels and Red Guards.⁶⁸ Mass arrests and firing on mass organizations was forbidden as was corporal punishment. Provincial and garrison commanders were no longer given authority to declare any mass organizations illegal. The central leadership also removed twelve provincial and regional commanders.

In the provinces and the cities, the new attitude of the Central Cultural Revolution leadership to the army was not long in taking its toll. Revolutionary rebels and Red Guards quickly recognized that the new directive signalled the

⁶⁸Chang, "Changing Patterns of Military Roles in Chinese Politics," p. 57.

extension of the revolution to the PLA. Maoists stormed and invaded local PLA headquarters and seized arms and documents. Officers were subjected to the interrogation sessions and harassments previously confined to Party and state cadres.⁶⁹

The developments of April 1967 were critical ones effecting the course of the Cultural Revolution and the role the military was to play in the future. There were two contradictory results. First, as just described, the radicals were encouraged to once again go on the offensive, this time against the PLA. But the events of April 1967 also firmed the loyalties and priorities of the PLA. It was clear to the PLA, too, that it was now the target of the revolution. And it was apparent that the central Defense Ministry leadership could not be counted upon for support. The confusion and destruction topped off by personal threats to their authority and lack of support from the center led to an intransigence and determination and settling of priorities and loyalties which undoubtedly influences attitudes up to the present time. The PLA commanders were now determined to protect their own professional interests and authority.

Summer 1967

By the summer of 1967 it had become evident that the theories of Mao on the correct role of the military in China no longer coincided with the army's own perception of itself, its

⁶⁹Ibid.

priorities, its loyalties. The maintenance of law and order, not the support of revolution was its self perceived task. Its loyalties were to the established structure. Internal stability as well as external security was its first priority. The events of July, August and September were to confirm these attitudes.

The most immediate manifestation of the hardening of attitudes and determination to action on the part of the PLA came with the Wuhan Incident of July. This extraordinary event took place in the strategic industrial complex of several cities on the Yangtze River known as Wuhan. Trouble had been brewing in Wuhan for several months.⁷⁰ Industrial workers had been on strike and revolutionary rebels and Red Guards were conducting political struggles on a large scale. Since April over 2,400 factories and mines had suspended production or dropped to less than half capacity. Some 50,000 workers were said to be directly involved in armed incidents of one sort or another. To cope with this situation, General Chen Tsai-tao, head of the Wuhan Military Region, had arrested some 10,000 persons and had intervened directly in the struggle between two competing revolutionary factions. Specifically, he had supported the conservative "One Million Heroes" mass organization at the expense of the Peking leaning rival "Three Command." These actions came finally to the

⁷⁰Thomas W. Robinson, "The Wuhan Incident-Local Strife and Provincial Rebellion During the Cultural Revolution," China Quarterly, No. 47, July-September, 1971, p. 413.

attention of the Central Cultural Revolutionary leadership. Two emissaries were dispatched to Wuhan, one a member of the Politburo and one a member of the Cultural Revolutionary Group, to admonish Chen and the region's Political Commissar for supporting the conservatives and suppressing the revolutionary faction. When they delivered their admonishment, local military leaders were incensed over the lack of support from Peking. After a particularly heated meeting, the two emissaries, Hsieh and Wang, were kidnapped and beaten by members of the "One Million Heroes" and by soldiers from a local PLA unit. The same group sealed off the city by blocking roads and bridges; seized the railway station, radio station and the airport. Forays were made against the "Three Command" faction.

This most defiant gesture yet by the military regional forces brought an immediate response from the Maoist leadership in Peking. The Wuhan Incident was perceived in Peking as an act of mutiny and the decision was to deal with it firmly. Army corps and airborne units descended upon Wuhan. Five gunboats from the East Sea Fleet were dispatched up the river to Wuhan. (In Hong Kong amused Englishmen and Americans referred to this as "Mao's Gun Boat Diplomacy".)⁷¹ The two Peking emissaries were finally released, General Chen and his supporters ousted and order restored under the control of elite Air Force officers brought in from another region.

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Ibid., p. 426.

But the impact of the Wuhan Incident - its significance - was not lost. The incident was an overt protest to the Peking leadership. It served notice that the PLA regional forces intended to resist those political decisions which ran counter to their own priorities. And it brought to a head their confrontation with the leaders of the Cultural Revolution. These leaders - Mao, Madame Mao, Lin Piao and the ideologist Chen Po-ta - then attacked the regional forces military leadership directly in a final effort to keep the Cultural Revolution from being halted or subverted by the PLA.

First came a series of verbal attacks. Madame Mao called for the overthrow of the "handful of capitalist power-holders in the army" and incited rebels to drag out the "Chen Tsai-tao types" in the provinces.⁷² In early August, Lin suggested that the Red Guards might "teach the cadres of military regions, military districts and People's Armed Departments who have made mistakes." And Lin issued a blistering order to his commanders: "Our PLA cadre policy from now on should be that whoever opposes Chairman Mao will be discharged. Whoever does not give prominence to politics will be discharged. . . ." ⁷³

A program of arming the Red Guards was begun and the

⁷²Chang, "Changing Patterns of Military Roles in Chinese Politics," p. 58.

⁷³Nelson, p. 460.

Cultural Revolution Group issued a new slogan "drag out the handful in the army." In response, the radicals began new raids on military headquarters, seized weapons from soldiers and warehouses; riots, fires and armed clashes between rebels and troops became widespread. By mid August, public order in many areas was in a shambles.⁷⁴

This led Mao to utilize his final trump card in the revolution. The Party, the state and the regional forces were already under attack and rendered incapable of use by Mao. Now only the elite main forces remained intact and uncommitted. It was decided to use these centrally controlled units to supplant the intransigent regional forces.

The irony of this decision is inescapable. The elite corps were the least politically indoctrinated, most professionally oriented organization in China. They, more than any other group, had escaped the requirement for indoctrination in Mao Tse-tung Thought. Now Mao counted upon them to support him in the fight to wrest political power from the hands of the well-indoctrinated regional forces, Party and state cadres.

The elite corps commanders were ordered to seize control of several military districts and run them directly.⁷⁵ They were directed to establish revolutionary committees or preparatory groups for revolutionary committees in those provinces where such steps had not been taken. In provinces

⁷⁴Chang, "Changing Patterns of Military Roles in Chinese Politics," p. 58.

⁷⁵Nelson, pp. 457-459.

not taken over directly, the regional force officers were stripped of much of their decision making authority. In some places an authority vacuum occurred during the transition. When a Red Guard organization in Canton attempted to report a shooting incident to military district headquarters in August, the telephone was not answered for over an hour. Finally, an answerer reluctantly informed the Red Guard leaders that "the military district is closed on Sundays"!⁷⁶

Almost immediately, the commitment of the main forces produced results which the Maoists could least afford. Dissidence broke out between the main force and regional force units.⁷⁷ Usually these struggles took the form of supporting rival mass organizations but some armed clashes did occur. There were a number of obvious causes of this factionalism. The main forces had been sent to correct the "mistakes" made by the regional forces. This naturally caused bad feeling. In addition, the regional forces felt a natural resentment toward the elite corps which had always enjoyed, as described earlier, a larger budget, more promotion opportunities and more prestigious assignments. And finally, difficulties emerged because of the political inexperience of the main force commanders. Thrust into highly charged, highly complicated political situations in unfamiliar locations they made many mistakes of

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 459.

strategy and judgment. There was a tendency for them to support rebel faction "A" because the previous regional forces organization had supported faction "B" thus making it obvious, the main force commanders felt, that faction "A" must be the faction which the central leadership would desire they support.

In wide areas the lack of cooperation for the "outsiders" brought in by Peking led to serious stalemates in which all functions normally performed by the Party, state and army came to a complete halt. If the situation were allowed to continue much longer soon no one would govern China.

While Mao is a dedicated revolutionary, he is also a practical man. At this point he moved to halt the attack on the PLA and to take steps which would allow order to be restored and government to function once again. A meeting was called in Peking attended by regional military commanders. A series of steps were taken to personally mollify the commanders and to restore their prestige and authority.

To gain the cooperation of the regional commanders, who were still rankled by the lack of support they had received from the central leadership of the PLA, Lin Piao denounced the General Political Department of the PLA and dismissed all of its senior members in Peking.⁷⁸ To restore the PLA's prestige, Peking launched a "support the army and love the people" campaign. An editorial was printed in the People's Daily on 28 August reminding, "Without the PLA, there would be no prole-

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 461.

tarian dictatorship; and without the proletarian dictatorship there would be no Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution."⁷⁹

Mao summed up the policy of healing wounds in the army:

The handful of persons within the Party taking the capitalist road should not be lumped together with the group of people taking the capitalist road in the military. We should mention only the handful in the Party and strive to make the military a success. . . .⁸⁰

Taking a personal hand in a campaign to restore confidence in the PLA, Mao himself toured six provinces where disturbances had occurred.

By September the PLA had also won authority to back up its renewed prestige. A directive was issued on 5 September by the Central Committee, the MAC and the Cultural Revolutionary Group jointly authorizing the PLA to use force to quell any disobedience.⁸¹

From this time forward the army slowly took control of China.

Fall 1967 to April 1969

What remained of the Cultural Revolution after August 1967 was firmly under the control of the PLA. Through the remainder of 1967, through all 1968 and until the Cultural Revolution officially ended at the Ninth Party Congress in April 1969, far reaching changes took place in China's political

⁷⁹Chang, "Changing Patterns of Military Roles in Chinese Politics," p. 59.

⁸⁰Nelson, p. 461.

⁸¹Chang, "Changing Patterns of Military Roles in Chinese Politics," p. 60.

system. The PLA enormously expanded its political role at the cost of the Party and state. And provincial authorities, dominated by the regional PLA commanders, acquired a substantial degree of political autonomy vis-a-vis the central leadership.

The PLA's entry into the functions normally dominated by cadres of the state apparatus - in the economy, in the judicial and police systems - has already been described. Now the PLA consolidated its position in these functions. A high priority was given to setting the wheels of the economy back in normal motion.⁸² In the fall of 1967, soldiers directed collection of the harvest. The following spring, PLA units mobilized the peasants to begin the spring planting. Units of the Rear Services Department even helped to repair farm machinery in an effort to get the agricultural sector back on its feet.

The PLA fulfilled its expanded role as police force and arbitor of justice with even more relish. Under the direction of the PLA, mass trials were held as a means of control and example. They were aimed at re-establishing order and discipline. A mass trial of "counter revolutionaries" and "criminal offenders" was reported by the Chinese press in Harbin in March 1968.⁸³ It was held outdoors before a crowd

⁸²Powell, pp. 748-749.

⁸³Powell and Yoon, pp. 1093-1095.

of 150,000. The Military Affairs Committee of the local Public Security Force pronounced the sentences at the conclusion of the trial. At another mass trial at Nanchang, the press reported that a PLA representative delivered a speech. At executions, the PLA provided the firing squads. In harshly cracking down on violence, disorders and crimes, the PLA often worked with old civilian Party cadres whom the army had "rehabilitated" after their purges earlier in the Cultural Revolution.

Finally, the PLA in its role as policeman helped to enforce a decision which went far in bringing a halt to the Cultural Revolution. That was the decision to send literally millions of students to the countryside. The factionalism, aimless violence and personal ambitions of the Red Guards had finally disillusioned Mao who became convinced that to gain the revolutionary spirit necessary to be worthy successors, students would have to engage in common labor like the peasant masses. Also, their skills, he thought, would benefit the villages and help to expand the settlement of the northern frontier. Most students, however, looked down on farming and peasants. Most expected their educations to provide a route of escape from peasant labor to more prestigious assignments in state offices or in Party posts in the cities.

In these circumstances, Mao issued a directive in December 1968 which stated that, "It is very necessary for educated young people to go to the countryside to be re-educated

by the poor and lower middle peasants."⁸⁴ The PLA was to be in charge of the program. One newspaper has reported that when PLA units received this order they held "grand rallies and celebrated all night."⁸⁵ This reported jubilation was officially supposed to have resulted from jubilation at "receiving an order from Chairman Mao." But it must also have reflected an element of sweet revenge on the part of soldiers who had been forced to put up with the earlier excesses of the arrogant Red Guard youths. In any case, the PLA promptly sent out teams to mobilize the youngsters and provided chaperones and transportation via the PLA-controlled railroads. In addition to youths sent to countryside work with the peasants, some 60,000 college graduates were sent to work and be re-educated on PLA farms. It is assumed that these were primarily political activists who had particularly alienated the military.

With the removal from the cities of the student activists, the leadership and hard core following of the Cultural Revolution had been eliminated from areas where they could effectively continue the activities of the Revolution. The PLA appeared now to be on top of the violent manifestations of the Cultural Revolution.

But the aggressiveness with which the armed forces took control after August 1967 is perhaps best expressed in terms of

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 1095-1097.

⁸⁵Ibid.

the participation of the PLA in the formation of the Revolutionary Committees which were to replace the defunct state apparatus and Party committees. In the six month period from September 1967 through March 1968, twelve committees were formed compared to only six committees in the first eight months of 1967.⁸⁶ More importantly, from an almost even division of membership among cadres, mass organizations and military on the earlier committees, now the military membership increased to 53 percent, the cadres slipped to 25 percent and the rebels dropped to 21 percent.

An example of the army's tactics in the formation of Revolutionary Committees is provided by Kansu Province.⁸⁷ During the first months of 1967, the PLA in Kansu gave no response to the call to support the left. On the contrary, the army expelled rebels who attempted to occupy a newspaper office in April 1967. When a Red Guard organization was finally supported by the PLA commanders in the summer, it was an organization which the commanders themselves had formed from four separate groups. The Preparatory Group for committee formation had, at the insistence of the Military Area Commander, "the PLA garrison as its center." When the Revolutionary Committee was established in January 1968, the PLA political commissar was its chairman and the membership included one cadre, one

⁸⁶Domes, pp. 122-125.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 125.

mass organization representative and nine military officers.

The period from March 1968 to April 1969 saw the formation of the remaining Revolutionary Committees. The Peking leadership was anxious enough, by this time, for a return to calm that orders were given to the regional commanders to impose Revolutionary Committees where none could be agreed upon by the participants in the Preparatory Groups.

Finally, with the Revolutionary Committee formation completed, Mao and the leadership called a Party Congress, the first in thirteen years. This Ninth Party Congress held in April 1969 was to officially conclude the Cultural Revolution by retroactively approving the events which had occurred, to restore Party morale, to make preparations to build a new Party apparatus and to ratify a new Party constitution. But the Ninth Party Congress also served to confirm the most unexpected and perhaps most significant political result of the Cultural Revolution - the emergence of the PLA as the dominant power structure in China.

The main speech of the Congress was delivered by Defense Minister Lin Biao who was designated in the new constitution as Mao's successor. Lin stressed the role of the military and the role of the Revolutionary Committee as the core of a rejuvenated Party.⁸⁸ More importantly, the army was conspicuously present at the Congress. The army strongly prevailed in the new Central Committee elected at the Congress.

⁸⁸Karnow, pp. 454-456.

Of the 279 members and alternate members, 44 percent (123) were military representatives. Of the 123, eighty were officers of the military region and military district commands and 56 held appointments on their provincial Revolutionary Committees concurrently with their military assignments. The commanders of all military regions were members. The 25 new members of the Politburo selected by the Central Committee, too, showed a heavy increase in military representation. Over fifty percent (13) of the membership was military and included were three regional force commanders.⁸⁹

At the close of the Cultural Revolution, then, it appeared that Lin Piao's dogmatic application of the theories of Mao Tse-tung on the role of the military as active participants in a continuing revolution had brought unexpected results. The PLA had participated in the Cultural Revolution. But the form of its participation seems to have been shaped by priorities not entirely consistent with the theories of Mao. Instead of revolution the PLA seemed to give priority to the maintenance of stability. And its loyalty appears to have gone to those who represented the bureaucratic system of which the PLA had, since 1949, itself become a part.

While it is not the purpose of this paper to analyze the influence of external events on internal Chinese politics, considerations of perspective do require that mention be made of the increasing pressure placed upon events in China by the

⁸⁹Waller, p. 69.

increasingly serious dispute with the Soviet Union. By January 1969, armed clashes had actually occurred on Damasky Island on the northeast border. The PLA's elite units - the army corps, the Air Force and the Navy - responsible for protection of China's border regions could not serve as internal peace keepers and at the same time maintain the readiness necessary in border areas during heightened tension. While little documented information is available, undoubtedly the increasing tension along the Sino-Soviet border during the final year of the Cultural Revolution strengthened the political hand of the PLA commanders whom Mao and the remaining Chinese leadership had now to rely upon not only to replace the almost non-existent Party and state apparatus and maintain internal security but also to provide the muscle to the Maoists' intensifying competition and contention with the Soviet Union.

The army appeared, then, as the 1960s ended, to be in a powerfully dominant position in China.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: 1970-1974

The question as China entered the 1970s was how the military would use its vast power. Would China become - had it already become - a military dictatorship? Or would the gun once more fall back into the hands of the Party?

Few scholars of China have addressed the question of the Chinese military's own perception of its role in Chinese Communist society. Do the Chinese marshals dream of themselves as warlords of their own military realms? Do they see themselves in Mao's vision as vanguards of a continuing revolution? Or do they see themselves in more modern, conventional terms as the professional keepers of law and order and the protectors of the homeland?

The period following the Cultural Revolution would seem to offer a fine opportunity to determine the PLA man's conception of his role in the new China for circumstances now offered him an unparalleled opportunity to influence if not dictate his own role. The Party was shattered and the state apparatus was in disarray. And as pointed out in the previous section what remained of the Chinese leadership was more dependent than ever before upon the one societal structure left in tact, the army. Moreover, the first two decades of its existence had given the PLA a taste of two contrasting roles - the conventional, professional role of the 1950s and the Maoist ideology-oriented role of the 1960s.

Whether the period turns out to be, indeed, a harbinger

of the future or instead a mere transition period it has been a time filled with tensions and drama. The sudden, unexpected downfall of Lin Biao; the downplaying, or perhaps better, the lowering of the PLA's profile; and the recent developments involving the PLA which appear related to the struggle for succession and the renewal of revolutionary struggle have all raised speculation about the future role of the PLA and merit a close inspection. But first it is necessary to set the stage, to comprehend the almost overwhelming dominance of the military in post-Cultural Revolutionary China.

The first two years following the Ninth Party Congress of April 1969 seem to have been devoted to bringing about a return to stability. The elite corps were removed from the internal trouble areas and returned to the now increasingly tense border areas, particularly in the north opposite the Soviet Union. The regional forces were once again in charge of the provinces.

In fact, the regional force commanders emerged from the frays of the Cultural Revolution in a stronger position than ever before. They controlled the Public Security Forces in China thus exercising power over the only other organized force remaining in the provinces which could challenge them. And they stepped now with increasing confidence into political and governmental roles. A prime example is the PLA regional forces participation in the re-establishment of the Party apparatus begun in 1970.⁹⁰ Party committees were formed in all

⁹⁰New York Times, 5 August 1971, p. 31.

provinces between December 1970 and August 1971. Of the 158 individuals holding the ranks of first secretary, second secretary or deputy secretary - the leadership positions - 95, or sixty percent, were military officers; 53, or 35.5 percent were Party/government cadres and a mere ten, or 6.4 percent, were "mass" representatives. Of the 29 first secretaries, 21 were military men. The circle seemed now to be complete. Before the Cultural Revolution, Party secretaries had often served concurrently as first political commissars of military units. Now local PLA commanders or political commissars functioned as provincial Party secretaries.

At the same time that the regional commanders were increasing their authority in the provinces they were apparently increasing their influence in Peking. That is not to imply that the regional commanders were in a position to dictate to the Peking leadership. But it does appear that the relationship had altered and now required a good deal of negotiation and bargaining. And even then, response to policy decisions made at the center was implemented as the regional commanders saw fit. The rectification of the Party is a prime example. Mao had decreed that the Party should conduct its reconstruction on the basis of "getting rid of the stale and taking in the new" and of an "open door" principle.⁹¹ The objective was to permanently expel old Party cadres and infuse the Party with new radical youths. The commanders, however, dragged their feet and

⁹¹Parris Chang, "Decentralization of Power," Problems of Communism, No. 4, July-August 1972, p. 71.

finally when new Party committees were formed they were overwhelmingly dominated, as the figures above show, by the military and the old cadres.

The role of the military in all facets of Chinese life was so overwhelming that it was even apparent to American visitors who began arriving in China in mid 1971. James Reston reported in the New York Times that "You don't have to be in China long to feel the influence of the military officers."⁹² Wherever visitors went, whether to a factory, to a commune, to a hospital or even to Peking University, they were introduced to the Chairman of the Revolutionary Committee who more often than not turned out to be a military officer. Reston, for example, was startled to find that the "rector" of Peking University was a PLA commander.

The significance of observations and indeed the ability of foreign observers to deduce the real trend of events in the closed society of Communist China is, unfortunately, highly doubtful. No better example of this sad conclusion can be had than the experience of the same correspondent Reston. In a story from Peking dated 27 August 1971, Reston matter of factly identified Lin Piao as Mao's successor and noted that Lin's future seemed secured by the overwhelming role that he and the army already obviously played in China.⁹³ Less than three

⁹²New York Times, 6 August 1971, p. 31.

⁹³Ibid.

weeks later Lin Piao was to flee China, branded as a traitor to Mao Tse-tung and the revolution.

The dramatic case of Lin Piao deserves special attention for a number of reasons. As just pointed out, it dramatizes our sad lack of intelligence about the internal politics of China and the trend of events in that country. Second, the demise of Lin Piao revealed in the course of time the continuing sharp divisions within the Chinese leadership. Finally, and most relevant to this paper, the case of Lin Piao offers the best example yet of the predicament inherent in the role of a military figure who must, by virtue of the system, become involved in politics as well as professional matters.

At first glance, Lin Piao bore a rather striking similarity to his predecessor as defense minister, Peng Te-huai. Like Peng, Lin had built his reputation as a military hero. Like Peng, Lin appeared uncomfortable and ill suited to the role of political figure. And finally, like Peng, Lin was to become the victim of his participation in political affairs. The irony of Lin, however, is that in contrast to Marshal Peng, Lin was the principal advocate within the PLA for the participation of the army in government and politics.

A brief review of Lin's remarkable twelve years as Defense Minister reveals the emphasis he placed upon the political role of the military. Among Lin's actions, already described, were a detailed program for political and ideological work in the PLA spelled out in 1960, a massive recruitment program for Party members, regulations formalizing the elevated

status of the commissar vis-a-vis the military commander, abolishment of the system of ranks and insignia for officers and cooperation between the military and the civilian population. Lin also took up his pen to emphasize his support for Mao's concept of a revolutionary army. His 1965 pamphlet, "Long Live People's Revolutionary War" praised Mao's theories. Finally, during the crises of July 1967, Lin had sided with Mao and against the recalcitrant PLA commanders. It will be remembered he ordered: "Our PLA cadre policy from now on should be that whoever opposes Chairman Mao will be discharged. Whoever does not give prominence to politics will be discharged. . . ."

Explaining Lin's demise has been a most delicate political problem for the Chinese precisely because of his impeccable credentials as Mao's successor. To expose as a traitor, the man designated in the constitution as the nation's next leader is no small problem. Consequently, the official explanations of the events which led to Lin's demise must be accepted as having a political function. They must serve to establish Lin Piao as a "villain" sufficiently dastardly to deserve his ultimate fate.

There have been three "official" Chinese explanations of what has come to be called, even in China, the Lin Piao Affair. The first explanation was contained in a document dated 13 January 1972 and circulated to officials throughout China. The second source was Mao Tse-tung himself in a conversation with foreign visitors in July 1972. The latest explanation was

given in the form of a report to the Tenth Party Congress which met in August 1973.

The document of 13 January 1972 was sent to officials of the PLA, the Party and state after rumors had circulated throughout the country since the early fall of 1971 concerning the strange prolonged absence of the Defense Minister, the Chief of Staff and other high officials of the PLA. This document alleged that Lin, his wife, son and several high officials planned to remove Mao as leader, hoping to force him to accept their terms but prepared to use "poison gas, bombings, car accidents, germ weapons, assassination, kidnapping . . ." if necessary.⁹⁴ Named as co-conspirator in the attempted coup was Chen Po-ta, Mao's secretary and a leader with Mao, Madame Mao and Lin in the Cultural Revolution. Mao was said to have had a falling out with Lin and Chen after the second plenary session of the Ninth Congress held in August-September 1970. The plotters' differences with Mao were alleged to stem from their opposition to steps taken to ease tensions in China after the Cultural Revolution.

As evidence of a plot to stage a coup, excerpts quoting from letters allegedly written by Lin Piao were included in the circulated document. "If we do not seize the revolutionary leadership, the leadership will fall into other hands," Lin is supposed to have written to a fellow plotter. Surprisingly,

⁹⁴New York Times, 18 October 1971, p. 9.

the document quoted a devastating critique of Mao the Politician.

At no time has B-52 (code name for Mao) stopped trying to pit one force against another. Today he may try to win over this force to deal with that, but tomorrow he may pit that force against this. . . . Looking back over past decades, how many do you see who were raised to power and fame by him but later escaped political death? What political force could survive coexistence with him?

Mao's description of Lin's fall from grace was given the following summer to two separate visitors, the French foreign minister and the prime minister of Ceylon. The explanation was obviously offered as one most suitable to foreign visitors as the earlier document had been intended to paint Lin in most incriminating terms to Chinese officials. Lin, Mao explained, was plotting to assassinate him as part of a conspiracy to replace the civilian leadership of China with a military dictatorship.⁹⁵ Lin had broken ranks with the rest of the leadership over a number of policy issues including the decision to seek normalization of relations with the United States and the move to rebuild the Party. Mao dated the beginning of the assassination conspiracy to December 1970 which was shortly after election of the first Party committee. When the attempt failed, Lin and his followers tried to escape to the Soviet Union and died when their plane crashed, Mao claimed.

The most recent explanation of the Lin Piao Affair was given to the Tenth Party Congress held last year, at which time the paragraph officially naming Lin as Mao's heir was stricken from the constitution. The new attack on Lin indicates that

⁹⁵Ibid., 28 July 1972, p. 1.

serious doubts must have been raised about the earlier explanation which focused on policy differences between Mao and Lin. Now it was asserted that Lin was motivated by a long time thirst for power. Lin was described to the Congress as a "most enthusiastic supporter of the Cultural Revolution because it enabled him to eliminate a very serious rival for power - Liu Shao-chi."⁹⁶ After removing Liu as a contender, the latest account alleges, Lin then turned his attention to his remaining serious rival, Premier Chou En-lai. But Chairman Mao came to Chou's defense. Mao, with his usual perceptivity, is credited with suspecting Lin as early as July 1966 but "could not afford open confrontation with Lin before the dust of the Cultural Revolution had settled in view of the key role played by the army." The confrontation finally broke into the open at a Central Committee meeting in the fall of 1970 when Yeh Chun, Lin's wife, proposed that Lin be appointed chief of state. Mao opposed this and delivered a strong criticism of Lin for his impatience.

Lin is then supposed to have turned into a "classical, feudal type conspirator." When Mao was returning to Peking by train on the night of 12 September 1971 after a tour of military bases, an assassination attempt took place. Mao escaped through a comic opera series of near disasters described in detail in the report. The flight of Lin, alleged to have ended when his plane ran out of fuel over Mongolia, is also

⁹⁶Ibid., 2 September 1973.

described in comic opera style.

What the Chinese - cadres, soldiers, students, peasants - make of this latest explanation is not known. What is known is that previous explanations have been received with unease and some scepticism. The continuing, ongoing campaign against Lin Piao presently being waged seems additional proof of that conclusion.

Viewing Lin Piao's fall from power from the perspective of the PLA, a few points bear consideration. The only PLA officials linked directly to the plot against Mao are those said to have died with Lin in the plane crash. They were the Chief of Staff, the Commander of the Air Force, the First Political Commissar of the Navy and the director of the General Logistics Department. All had long personal ties to Lin Piao. And all were in the central Peking leadership of the PLA. Purges which took place in the army afterward - and which can be linked in any way to the Lin Piao Affair - occurred for the most part in the central leadership and all involved officers with personal ties to Lin Piao. No evidence is available to link any officers outside Lin's own personal coterie to the alleged conspiracy of 1971. Indeed apparently no one in the army lifted a hand to help Lin and his friends at the time of their alleged escape attempt.

A theory which links Lin Piao's fall from power to the PLA commanders is pure conjecture. However, it could be asserted on the basis of evidence already summoned that the commanders had scant reason to support Lin Piao when he had

allowed them to come under attack during the Cultural Revolution. And they had since 1969 been able to exert considerable political clout in dealing with their earlier opponents: the fall from power of Chen Po-ta and diminished role of Madam Mao in 1970 were said to have been accomplished at the behest of the commanders.

The cause of Lin's fall from power may have been a clash over policies; Mao's paranoia over possible rivals (as suggested in the Lin letters); the plotting of conservative opponents in the Party, state and army; or, most likely, a combination of all three. Whatever the precise cause and scenario of the Lin Piao Affair, Lin appears above all to have been a victim of his own insistence on following the philosophy of military-political involvement.

After the purge of Lin, the Chinese leadership began a nation-wide campaign to downgrade the role of the military in non-military affairs and to reassert the old Maoist principle that the Party controls the gun. As a part of this campaign, Mao's role as leader of the army was given new prominence. "Chairman Mao is in command of our glorious army."⁹⁷ And it was emphasized that this leadership derived from Mao's role as Party leader. Chinese broadcasts and articles stressed that the local Party committees and the central Party leadership controlled the armed forces.

There is no evidence that the PLA resisted this new

⁹⁷Ibid., 2 August 1972.

trend toward a reduction of its role in non-military activities. Many officers were apparently concerned that the involvement of the PLA in the economy, in the schools, in the security forces, etc. had overextended the army at the expense of combat readiness. And the primary responsibility of the PLA commanders remained, after all, national defense.

While the role of the PLA diminished, then, in non-military affairs which took time away from combat training, there is less evidence that the commanders relinquished much of their political clout. While it was emphasized that control of the armed forces lay in the hands of the Party, it should be remembered that with the formation of the new Party committees in 1970, most of the Party committees lay in the hands of the commanders (see page 63). The military representation at the recent Tenth Party Congress indicates that the regional force commanders continued to hold power in the provinces. The PLA's membership in the Central Committee had shrunk from 127 to 100.⁹⁸ However, almost all of this reduction is accounted for by the purge of Lin Piao supporters at the center and a few Lin loyalists in the provinces. All eleven military region commanders continued to sit on the Central Committee. The same pattern occurs in the 25 member Politburo. PLA representation had dropped from thirteen to seven. But the reduction is accounted for by Lin and his apparent accomplices in the central leadership.

⁹⁸Ibid., 2 September 1973.

Events of the past year in China, in so far as they effect the PLA, reflect the continued unsettled state of internal political affairs. The purge of Lin Piao left China without a designated successor to Mao Tse-tung. This has led to much jockeying for position among the various groups in China which maintain some political power. And it has led Mao to once again express concern about the perpetuation of the revolution in China after his departure and has apparently precipitated a move by him to begin a second Cultural Revolution.

These developments have had ramifications within the PLA. Since the purge of Lin and his staff, the PLA has been without a defense minister, a chief of staff, a commander of the air force and a political commissar of the navy. It had been expected that appointments to these posts would be settled prior to convening of the Tenth Party Congress and approved by that group but none were forthcoming.⁹⁹ This failure is due to the continuing split in the leadership. It has of course the effect of re-enforcing the power of the regional force officers who are answerable to no strong central military leadership and must be dealt with by the center Party leadership.

In addition to the power struggle - which the Chinese have publicly acknowledged - the renewal of the Cultural Revolution was announced at the Tenth Party Congress and has also effected affairs in the PLA. While the initial months of this new revolution have not been accompanied by the violence and

⁹⁹Ibid.

disruption of the first, there has apparently been resistance.

There have been two manifestations which indicate resistance in the PLA to this renewal of political struggle. First, steps were taken in the late summer of 1973 to activate an urban militia force.¹⁰⁰ There has been much speculation over the intended use of this urban militia force. The official reason given for its activization is preparedness for the possibility of a Soviet attack. However, there is also speculation that it may have a political motive. This urban militia force is seen as a warning to the regional commanders not to attempt to oppose decisions which may be taken by the center Party leadership concerning either the succession or renewal of the Cultural Revolution. Should the military attempt to interfere, so the reasoning goes, the leadership could use the militia as a counter force to the PLA. If this sounds a bit far fetched, the scene at Lushan should be recalled. In his famous showdown with Marshal Peng, Mao had threatened to recruit a new army should the commanders oppose him. Consequently, it is conceivable that Mao and the radicals in the leadership might intend the new urban militia as a counter force to the PLA in any showdown over policy or succession. (While a token militia force already existed, it is primarily peasant based. The urban worker is considered more politically active and less reluctant to oppose the army than the more conservative peasants.)

The renewal of the Cultural Revolution also appears

¹⁰⁰Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 20 December 1973, p. 13.

related to the dramatic news of January 1974 that all military regions had been assigned new commanders with the incumbents transferred to a new regional command.¹⁰¹ It might logically be supposed that the commanders opposed the renewal of the struggles which had been so disruptive to China in the 1960s. They had, after all, been responsible for stopping the first Cultural Revolution.

While none of the regional commanders appears to have been purged, reassignment may be as successful in stunting their power to oppose renewal of the Cultural Revolution. Much of the power of the regional commanders has come from their long association with the region over which they had command. The Chinese have never had a tradition of transferring military personnel from region to region, hence commanders have been able to build up strong power bases. For example, General Hsu Shih-yu had served as commander of the Nanking Military Region since the establishment of the People's Republic.¹⁰² Many of his subordinates had remained in Nanking with him throughout this period. His removal to Canton as commander of that military region may have effectively neutralized his political power for some time (particularly since poor Hsu speaks no Cantonese).

The long term significance of the recent transfers of

¹⁰¹New York Times, 4 January 1974, p. 3.

¹⁰²Ibid.

regional force commanders is still uncertain. In the short term it has undoubtedly allowed the radicals to commence the new Cultural Revolution. But this is probably only the first battle in what most people expect to be a protracted struggle in China over leadership and the direction China will take in the future.

If the commanders' political power has been reduced by recent events, it is still difficult to see how the PLA could be left out of any decision on the succession and China's future. The PLA continues to be the strongest, the most disciplined power structure in China today. It represents to a large extent still, the interests of the provinces. And the recent Party Congress has given ample evidence of the continuing weakness created at the center by the struggle for power.

There is today a sense of unease both inside and outside China concerning developments in that giant country. This unease is heightened by the leadership's own acknowledgement that many decisions remain unsettled, including issues of leadership, foreign and domestic policy. Perhaps what frightens most however is the deliberate choice of the Chinese not to build strong institutions and hence not to institutionalize decision making in their society. This, more than anything else, leads one to conclude in 1974 that the armed forces - the one strong institution - remain by necessity a powerful force in China's government and politics.

CONCLUSION

It was suggested earlier in this paper that drawing conclusions from events which have or are taking place in China is a risky business. China watchers have come to expect the unexpected. Having said that, it does seem possible to discern some trends or patterns emerging from the past 24 years which may help to place in perspective the themes upon which this paper sought to focus.

The role of the army in China has been played against a back drop of continuing revolutionary struggle primarily fostered by Mao Tse-tung. Mao has always believed that true revolution would come to China only if it were a continuous process carried out over decades, possibly hundreds of years. If this process were to stop, what had already been won might be lost. China might revert back into an elitist, capitalist society. Mao saw this continuing struggle based upon contradictions; foremost among these contradictions in the past 24 years has been that between Maoist and bureaucratic styles of governing. The struggle between these two basic philosophies of how China should be run has been variously described in such terms as ideological versus professional, red versus expert, men versus machines, politics versus technology, leadership versus organization, etc. The role of the PLA can only be properly evaluated in terms of this setting and this paper has attempted to trace the role of the PLA through the ebb and flow of this continuing struggle.

In this setting what evaluation can then be made of the influence of Mao's philosophy on the course of the military since the revolution? What evaluation can be made of its relevance? To the extent that the army has participated in government and politics Mao's philosophy can be said to have been influential for it has been his intent that the army participate. Mao's influence over the army, however, as over all aspects of Chinese life, has ebbed and flowed since 1949. It reached its nadir, perhaps, in the mid-1950s as the PLA set about transforming itself into a conventional military force led by a professional officer corps. Since the late 1950s the army's participation in government and politics has steadily increased.

However, the nature of the army's participation does not seem to have conformed to Mao's vision and it is this nature of the army's participation which calls into question the relevance of Mao's philosophy. The army has participated in government and politics within the framework of its self perceived priorities and loyalties; it has not participated as the vanguard of a continuing revolution as Mao had envisioned. It has not championed the ideological, the political side of the contradiction. The army has not served this purpose, this paper suggests, because it could not. To expect the army to foster revolution in a post revolutionary society may represent a contradiction in itself. The Red Army won victory in 1949. It did this in the name of the Communist Party and the new Communist state. It is the organizational structure of the

state, the Party and the army itself - the institutional structure of the nation - which gives the army legitimacy. To expect an army to act as a force to destroy that which it has created and that which gives it legitimacy would seem to ask the impossible. The Maoist theories which were designed to exploit the revolutionary role of the Red Army no longer appear to be relevant to the institutionalized post-revolutionary PLA.

If the participation of the army in politics and government has been upon its own terms - based upon the loyalties and priorities which the army has developed - what are these loyalties and priorities? If the past two and one-half decades are any guide, the army's priorities are stability and security. Internal stability and external security. Its loyalties have been to the established structures of the Party, state and army. The events of the greatest crisis in the short history of the People's Republic, the Great Cultural Revolution, provide the evidence to support this conclusion. Called upon to lead the revolution, the army instead through its role in politics and government served as a force of restraint rather than as an avant garde. In its governmental functions, the army emphasized maintenance of law and order and protection of the country's economy. Its participation in politics served to demonstrate its loyalty to the established structure as the army sought to protect the technicians and cadres who form the backbone of the Party and state. And above all, the army sought to protect its own authority. The experience of the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath seem to have

served to further firm these same loyalties and priorities.

Finally, to what extent has the army played a part in government and politics and to what extent is it likely to continue to play a role? To what extent has the military role of the PLA officer affected - and likely to affect in the future - his role and influence in government and politics? The experience of the two most prominent military officers in post-revolutionary China support the view that so long as a military officer maintains his military post his political and governmental responsibilities will be affected by his military responsibilities. His position on state and Party issues will be influenced by his priorities and loyalties as a military officer. To deny these priorities and loyalties may be to sacrifice the base of support which has provided the basis for the military officer's authority. In short, it appears inevitable that the commanders of the PLA who will carry the mantle of leadership in the future will share the dilemma of their predecessors, that is, how to fulfill the oftentimes contradictory roles of military officer, politician and statesman. It will not be easy.

The army's participation in government and politics can be linked to the ebb and flow of the revolutionary struggle. When other institutions have been under attack or weakened as in the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath, the army has served to fill the vacuum. When the other institutions of China have shown vitality the army's role has ebbed. As to the future, James Townsend in his recent book Politics in China,

anticipating struggles over succession and policies, warns that, "We may not yet have seen the last of revolutionary struggle in modern China." If that is the case, if the other institutional structures of China remain weak and subject to attack and change, then experience of the past would suggest that the People's Liberation Army will continue to play an important role, perhaps a decisive role, in the politics and government of China.

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